Head Office: Università degli Studi di Padova

Human Rights Center "Antonio Papisca"

International Joint Ph.D. Programm "Human Rights, Society, and Multi-Level Governance"

Cycle: XXXV

EXPLORING MODELS OF POLITICAL SECULARISM AS PREDICTORS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PERCEPTIONS IN ITALY AND CROATIA:
A CROSS-NATIONAL SURVEY AMONG YOUTH

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on the relationships between religious freedom and political secularism, comparing two Catholic EU countries, Italy and Croatia, and adopting an empirical perspective. The main objective is to understand whether, at the individual and societal level, endorsing political secularism enhances or limits the support of religious freedom in these two contexts. The study draws upon the recently developed field of the sociology of religious freedom, yet, unlike most of studies in this scholarly domain, instead of looking at political secularism just as a 'competing' ideology with respect to religion, it understands it as a multidimensional concept, which may take more moderate or radical forms, with regard to the role of religion in politics and public sphere.

More specifically, the research project is based on the key distinction between two models of secularism, 'institutional' and 'ideological', whose impact on different aspects of religious freedom is assessed. Moreover, it comparatively explores the different patterns of perceptions of political secularism and religious freedom in Italy and Croatia, and also the links among those perspectives and religious and political identities, thus shedding light on the role of the two countries' socio-religious features in shaping their different societal configurations.

Methodologically, the research takes a quantitative approach, analyzing the results of a cross-national survey on Social Perception of Religious Freedom (SPRF) that was carried out in Italy and Croatia, between September 2021 and January 2022, and that involved 1,317 university students at the Universities of Padua and Zagreb.

The results show the strong predictive ability of political secularism for the emergence of different individual and societal perceptions of religious freedom and validate the hypothesis that it is necessary to consider political secularism's multiple 'facets' in order to fully understand its influence on support for religious freedom in different countries. Moreover, they show the high sensitivity of both political secularism and religious freedom to left-right political cleavage, and the need to analyze religious majority-minority relations to comprehend the role of religious affiliations in the way secularism and religious freedom are experienced in different contexts.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the practical and emotional support of so many people who have accompanied me on this long journey. I would like to express my gratitude first to my supervisor, Prof. Giuseppe Giordan, for listening and encouraging me, and for his valuable advice, without which this thesis could not have been written. I would also like to thank Prof. Olga Breskaya, who has been a guide for me since the beginning of this project. I thank her for her generosity in sharing with me her deep expertise, and for her willingness to discuss every aspect of this thesis. Special thanks also go to Prof. Siniša Zrinščak, for whose work I have deep respect, for hosting me at the University of Zagreb and generously supporting me during my stay abroad in Croatia.

I faced many challenges during this work, particularly that of writing in a language that is not my mother tongue. For this, I thank Timothy Maness, for his incomparable thoroughness in reviewing my thesis.

The doctoral years are a time of evolution and change. This whole process would have been much more difficult if I had not had wonderful colleagues beside me with whom to share successes and laugh at defeats, colleagues whose friendship is for me one of the most important personal achievements of these years. I am thinking in particular of Teuta Stipišić, with whom I have shared everything in these three years: without her, her strength and our time together, this PhD would not have been the same. Then, to Davide Carnevale, Martina Mignardi and Valentin Mahou-Hekinian, very bright friends.

In addition to the world of Padua and the Human Rights Center, my debt goes to Trento, to Prof. Marco Ventura and the FBK-ISR research center for encouraging me to start this doctoral path. Then to Rome, to Claudio Paravati and the entire team of the magazine and study center Confronti, who over these years have always been at my side in times of difficulty, offering me all their emotional and practical support. Without the weekends in the office of Via Firenze, 38 the writing of this work would not have been possible, especially in its final stages.

My deepest gratitude, however, goes to my lifelong loved ones, who have endured and never left me alone, despite the fact that in these three years I have often done so with them. For this

I thank my family: my parents Marina Mesnič and Emilio Leofreddi, my grandmother Carolina Perelli, my aunt and her husband, Monica Leofreddi and Gianluca Delli Ficorelli. But above all, my deepest gratitude goes to my friends, who never failed to make me feel their closeness and to whom goes my deepest esteem: Costanza Bonelli, Armanda Cetrulo, Margherita Marchioni, Minu Mazloumi, Elettra Pierantoni, Marianna Scuglia, Valentina Sensi.

Finally, the person I want to thank the most is my life partner Gianluigi Papa. His love, solidity and deep intelligence have been the one true incomparable engine that has allowed me to reach the end of this long and incredible journey.

This thesis is dedicated to Emma, Beatrice, and Riccardo, the youngest of my loved ones, with the hope that no fear of failure will ever prevent them from pursuing their dreams.

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Introduction

This thesis brings an empirical perspective to a study of the relationship between religious freedom and political secularism in two Catholic EU countries: Italy and Croatia. In order to do so, it draws upon the sociology of religious freedom, and upon theoretical and empirical enquiries into secularism.

In recent years, the question of the impact of political secularism on the implementation of religious freedom has emerged within the sociology of religious freedom, mostly driven by practical concerns. The rise in Western democracies of governmental restrictions on religious practices (Pew Research Center, 2019), particularly with regard to women's religious dress and the display of religious symbols, has led scholars to question whether and to what extent political secularist ideologies, entrenched in states and societies, support religious freedom or restrict it, effectively privileging religiousness and the protection of other human rights over religious freedom.

Even though studies on the topic are still few at the moment, those that do exist have two main limitations. First, most of them examine the relationship between religious freedom and political secularism from the perspective of governments (e.g., Fox, 2015a, 2015b, 2020) or human rights courts (Richardson, 2015). Academic works dealing with people's views are still practically absent (for an exception, see Breskaya et al., 2021b; Breskaya e al., 2022), despite the proven important role of political secularism in affecting people's political behaviours and attitudes towards human rights (see, e.g., Arzheimer, 2023; Beard et al. 2013; Campbell et al., 2018; Di Marco et al., 2020).

Second, in this scholarly domain, political secularism is mostly addressed as a 'competing ideology' to religion (Finke, 2022; Fox, 2015b, 2018), and little space is given to the comparative empirical analysis of its more moderate or radical manifestations, even though that distinction is well studied in sociology (Baubérot, 2015; Casanova, 2009, 2011), political theory (Modood, 2010), and comparative politics (Kuru, 2009; Philpott, 2019).

This study aims to address these gaps in knowledge. First, it does so by focusing on the way political secularism and religious freedom are experienced at the micro-level, instead of the governmental-policy level. More specifically, it asks whether different attitudes towards political secularism produce different patterns of religious freedom and social perceptions in

Italy and Croatia, at individual and societal levels. It also addresses these gaps by investigating the relationships between religious freedom and political secularism, by taking into account the different dimensions of the latter. Indeed, the study is based on a key distinction between two secularist models, 'institutional' and 'ideological', which represent different positions on the role of religion in the political and social sphere, and comparatively tests their influence on support for different aspects of religious freedom.

Methodologically, the research program takes a quantitative approach. It is based on a cross-national survey design and analyses data from a questionnaire on religious freedom perceptions submitted to a convenience sample of 1,317 students at the Universities of Padua and Zagreb. In the following paragraphs, we propose a brief overview of the whole thesis. First, we discuss the background of the study. Second, we illustrate our research aims, objectives, and hypotheses. Third, we briefly describe the reasons to compare Italy and Croatia, and the research design used to respond to the research questions. Finally, we highlight the reason why this study should be considered significant and provide an outline of the chapters.

II. Background of the research

The study of the link between political secularism and religious freedom has created a longstanding debate in the social sciences. Two contrasting perspectives have emerged on the topic. On the one hand, scholars have stressed political secularism's origins as a democratic impulse, and its normative purpose of creating a public sphere open to all individuals as equal citizens, regardless of their particular identities (Jakelić, 2022). In this scholarly perspective, political secularism represents a mode of organising contemporary political communities, managing their growing religious and 'moral pluralism' (Maclure & Taylor, 2011), with the aim of avoiding religious domination and guaranteeing religious freedom to all (Bhargava, 2009, 2011; see also Milot, 2011). On the other hand, others have emphasised political secularism's anti-religious and hegemonic character, questioning its fairness even in Western democratic countries, especially with regard to non-Western religious minorities (e.g., Calhoun, 2008; Modood & Kastoryano, 2007). According to these scholars, secularism's Western roots and the separation of religion from politics that it mandates, with the relegation of religion to the private sphere, ends in the privilege of non-religious beliefs or privatised forms of Christianity (e.g., Asad, 2003; Hurd, 2004; Mahmood, 2016).

Within the framework of religious freedom studies[1], this second idea of political secularism as an ideological construct, in conflict with religion, seems to have prevailed. Although some works have proved that secular agendas promote the rights of religious minorities (Richardson, 2015), it is more commonplace to assume that secularism has an oppositional stance toward religion in general. Secularism is, therefore, a global challenge to religious freedom (Little, 2013) and secularist beliefs are assumed to promote a narrower conception of religious freedom as spoiled by any public or political character (Banchoff & Wuthnow, 2011, p.4).

Fox (2015b, 2018) defines secularism as ʿan ideology or set of beliefs advocating that religion ought to be separated from all or some aspects of politics or public life' and, according to his theory of religious-secular competition (see Fox, 2015), he ascribes the decline of religion in Western societies, not to secularisation, but to the social, political, and economic processes triggered by secularism, ʿan ideological challenge to religion, especially in the political and social sphere'. In his view, therefore, 'the liberal ideal of religious freedom', instead of being supported by political secularism, is 'often trumped by secular ideology and beliefs' (Fox, 2020).

In his work on patterns of Church-State relations and religious freedom, W. Cole Durham (2012a) distinguishes between the positive effects of secularity on religious freedom and the negative effects of secularism. While secularism, as with Fox, is classified as an ideology, secularity is ʿa neutral framework within which a broad range of religious communities can build a common life' (Durham, 2012a, p. 371). Moreover, while the former, in its rigid forms, is often associated with the religiousness of the public sphere and puts state neutrality above freedom of religion and conscience, the latter softens both neutrality and demands for privatisation to protect it. It follows that secularity promotes optimal levels of religious freedom more than secularism does. However, this correlation is most positive when secularity is associated with the cooperative model of State-Church relations, while it tends toward the negative when combined with the separation of religion and State (Durham, 2012a, p. 363).

In the opinion of some scholars, in Western democracies, the mixture of political secularism and secularisation seriously affects the protection and implementation of religious freedom more than secularism alone does. Indeed, the loss of religion's political and social importance leads states not to protect religious freedom as they instead become indifferent towards it.

The American scholar Mary Ann Glendon (2018) writes:

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[1] For an overview, see Breskaya et al., 2018.

Given the growing numbers of persons in Western nations who are not affiliated with any organized religion, or who describe themselves as not religious at all, it would be surprising if concern for freedom of religion had not declined. The more that people come to see religion as a private, solitary activity, or as something like a hobby, the greater the likelihood that their concern about full, robust free exercise as envisioned in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is apt to diminish (p.330).

The growing number of people declaring themselves non-religious corresponds to the rise of secularist views on politics and the legal system, with the result that: 'Fear of religiously motivated violence, together with increasing secularism, greatly complicates the task of defending religious freedom in Europe' (Glendon, 2018, p. 331).

The same position is supported by W.C. Durham (2012b), who claims that the story of religious freedom in the West today is more one of failure than of oppression: 'A striking feature of the crisis is its incremental character. In the regions where most of us live, it is a crisis of apathy more than passion, of gradual erosion and cultural drift more than dramatic political and social transformation. It is a crisis of lost moorings' (Durham, 2012b, p. 360).

According to some scholars, this alleged indifference is compounded by the difficulty of balancing religious freedom with other new rights, mostly concerned with morality policies. Marta Cartabia (2012), who sees secularism as an ideology that opposes religion, sees a paradigm shift taking place especially at the legislative level: the priority once accorded to the principle of freedom is given instead to that of equality, understood, however, in the sense of non-discrimination and privacy. This change, she believes, has serious implications for the protection of religious groups. The principle of non-discrimination, in fact, is closely related to an idea of a neutral public sphere, which to fulfil itself necessarily ends up marginalising religion. As Cartabia writes: 'In fact, secularism is not neutral toward religion; it is rather a neutralising element of the religious presence in the public space. Sooner or later, maybe through incremental steps, secularism becomes inimical to religion' (Cartabia, 2018, p. 450). The effects of this change are seen especially when religious freedom is confronted with the protection of what she calls the 'new rights' that is, first and foremost, sexual reproductive rights. In these cases, the latter are favoured over the former, in a social and legislative process whereby religion is increasingly being 'portrayed and perceived as a hindrance to the full accomplishment of the human rights project, a major component of our contemporary liberal societies' (Cartabia, 2018, p. 429).

III. Research aims and objectives

The studies mentioned above propose an understanding of political secularism that is, in our opinion, too essentialist. It does not take into account either the ways in which political secularism is interpreted by social actors or the different forms it can take even within the same contexts. Far from being monolithic, these contexts often host different visions of secularism, more or less intransigent with respect to religion (see Baubérot, 2013, 2015; Kuru, 2009).

Therefore, this study, focusing on the societal instead of the institutional level, aims to assess the impact of different attitudes towards political secularism on social perceptions of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia. It starts from the assumption that political secularism is a multidimensional concept which does 'not relate to religions solely through power contestations and conflicts but through shared moral sources as well' (Jakelić, 2022, p.364; see also Bhargava, 2011). More specifically, following José Casanova (2009), it proposes to distinguish between two secularist models: *institutional secularism* and *ideological secularism*. The first entails the principle that there should be some degree of separation between religion and political authority to protect both freedoms of religion and beliefs and also equal citizenship for all, yet without completely excluding religion from participation in the political and social spheres. The second model advocates for the strict separation between religion and State and the complete marginalisation of religion in politics and society. In comparative terms, we add a third to these two models: *religious establishment*, which we define as stances favouring 'not separation but a union or alliance between church/religion/set of religions and the state' (Bhargava, 2009, p. 85).

On the basis of our literature review (Ch. 1 and 2), which shows a close link between political and religious identities on one hand and secularism and religious freedom on the other, and also in light of concerns that have been expressed about the protection of religious freedom in societies that are increasingly more secularist and indifferent to religion, four research objectives have been identified:

1. To compare social perceptions of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia;
2. To compare the attitudes towards *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* in Italy and Croatia;
3. To find out the differences among religious and political groups concerning their attitudes towards *institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*;

4. To test the impacts of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* on three dimensions (societal, individual, expression of religion in public) of religious freedom.

We hypothesise that the endorsement of the *ideological secularism* model may diminish support for religious freedom, even though it is still a minority position in mono-confessional Italian and Croatian societies. At the same time, we suggest that the *institutional secularism* model has a positive impact on religious freedom support, especially in a democracy where religion continues to hold strong ties with national and ethnic identity (Casanova, 2009; Mancini & Rosenfeld, 2020).

Concerning *establishment*, instead, we hypothesise that greater endorsement for religious establishment leads to lower support for religious freedom (Finke, 2013; Finke & Martin, 2014; Gill, 2008; Sarkissian, 2015).

IV. Why compare Italy and Croatia?

When dealing with secularism and religious freedom, most studies consider 'exceptional' models of secularism such as France, with its radical form of *laïcité*, or the United States, with its principle of disestablishment (e.g., Cady & Hurd, 2010; Kosmin & Keysar, 2007; Kuru, 2009). Rarer are the empirical works that deal with this relationship in predominantly Catholic countries, and even fewer in post-communist ones.

Despite this, the comparison between Italy and Croatia is interesting for a number of reasons. Indeed, although they are both Catholic countries with similar institutional features in terms of Church-State relations, they have very different political and religious histories, each of which has important repercussions for the way secularism and religious freedom have historically been interpreted.

In Italy, the link between the State and the Catholic Church dates back to the birth of the nation, yet, today it is going through a new phase. Although the Catholic Church is still able to influence social and political dynamics, the pluralisation of the cultural and religious public sphere is challenging it from below (Martino, 2014). Croatia, by contrast, experienced two forms of secularism: from 1945 to 1991, it was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which, inspired by anti-religious ideological stances, established a strict separation between Churches and State, marginalised religion from public life, and treated religious people as second-class citizens (Stella, 1979). Today, instead, Croatia follows a model close to many other European countries, yet, the high number of Catholics and the low number of non-

believers and minorities do not significantly challenge the critical points of a system that still grants the Catholic Church a privileged role in many crucial areas (Staničić, 2019).

However, the most important differences between Italy and Croatia reside in the religious dynamics affecting their social spheres and in their consequences in terms of pluralism, the position of religious minorities, and the links between dominant religion and national identity. According to national research, both countries are highly religious; however, they are marked by different trends in religiosity, especially among the younger generations. Whereas, in the last thirty years, Italy has been marked by a dramatic decline of Catholic religious affiliations, accompanied by a rise of non-religious people (Garelli, 2020); since the 1990s, Croatia has witnessed a process of revitalization of religion similar to other post-communist countries, characterised by a dramatic rise of both individual and collective religiosity (Črpić & Zrinščak, 2010) and processes of politicisation of institutional religions (Iveković, 2002).

Concerning religion and national identity, although in both Italy and Croatia religion has played a fundamental role in the construction of national identity, the Catholicism-nationality binomial has been constructed in different ways. While in Italy Catholicism has become 'a way of believing in one collective identity' (Pace, 2007) in a country otherwise devoid of a sense of collective belonging and perennially distrustful of public institutions (Garelli, 2014); in Croatia, by contrast, Catholicism was always the only element able to mark a boundary of ethnic belonging in a multi-ethnic region such as the Balkans, subjected to continuous dominations. In the 1990s, the war transformed religion into the political instrument of ethnic nation-building, increasing the link between religion and nationalism, so much so that today, for most Croats, confession is synonymous with nationality (Perica, 2002).

Finally, the two countries have had different experiences with religious diversity (Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018). Italy, which for a long time was a mono-confessional country with a Catholic majority, has in recent decades experienced a pluralisation of the religious sphere, due above all to the arrival of migrants bringing new confessional identities (Ambrosini et al., 2018). This has opened up spaces for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, especially on a social level (Ercolessi, 2009). In Croatia, on the contrary, national and religious diversification still carries with it the ethnic divisions that erupted during the war. Non-European migration flows are a recent phenomenon, and the number of newcomers is still very low, too low to be able to speak of a new pluralism.

V. Research design: epistemology and methodology of the research

This project takes an analytical approach that draws on the recent but growing field of research known as the sociology of human rights. This field sees human rights as socially constructed. Its main goal is to study the social and political processes by which historically- and geographically- specific meanings of human rights are formed and contested, how authority is created or won to define what human rights are and should be, and whose rights and obligations are at stake in a particular contest (Anleu, 1999; Blokker & Guercio, 2020; Frezzo, 2015; Nash, 2015).

More specifically, regarding the right to religious freedom, we rely on the theoretical and methodological framework proposed by the theory of social perception of religious freedom (SPRF), coined by Breskaya and Giordan (2019). Going beyond human rights normativity, these two authors see religious freedom as a multidimensional and socially constructed concept, whose meaning is contextually defined by the interaction between individual (e.g., religiosity, political orientation) and environmental (e.g., state-religion relations, levels of religious pluralism) variables. Although social constructionism is traditionally allied to qualitative methods (Burr, 2015), the study of SPRF proposes to adopt a quantitative empirical methodology. Indeed, its purpose is to identify different shared patterns of social perception of religious freedom, verifying its prevailing meanings in different societies.

Therefore, the present study adopts a survey research design, designing a cross-national survey whose study population is university students in Italy and Croatia. The research involved 1,317 students, part of a convenience sample consisting of university students from the Universities of Padua (=714) and Zagreb (=603), who were asked to answer the questions in the 'Religion and citizenship in Italy and Croatia' questionnaire, which we co-developed together with a research team at the Human Rights Center of the University of Padua. The data were collected between September 2021 and January 2022. It was originally planned to collect them through the paper-and-pencil method. However, due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has moved university courses online, we were forced to apply a mixed collection methodology (telephone interviews, paper-and-pencil, online survey). To analyse them we applied both descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

VI. Significance of the Study

This thesis contributes to the development of the emerging field of the sociology of religious freedom and human rights. In these fields, its significance is both theoretical and methodological.

One of the fundamental questions sociological approaches to human rights seek to answer is: 'if human rights are to be realised in practice, then what kinds of conditions do they require?' (Nash, 2009). The results of this thesis show that, despite every criticism, at a societal level, secularism is the orientation that most favours a positive culture of religious freedom, both in Italy and Croatia. At the same time, they show that it is necessary to go beyond any normative conception of secularism and, even with regard to religious freedom, analyse it as a complex phenomenon composed of different orientations. Indeed, in both countries, there are differences in perceptions of religious freedom between those who support an institutional approach to secularism and those who prefer an ideological approach. The former has a positive perception of religious freedom in all its aspects. The latter, however, have a positive perception of this right only as a promoter of social cohesion and of respect for minorities, and as a protector of individual freedom to believe or not to believe; they have a negative perception of the same right when it comes to the freedom of religions to express themselves in the public space.

However, the findings also provide interesting insights in reference to religious establishment. They show that the relationships between establishment and religious freedom change depending on context, and take different forms in Western and post-communist countries.

Finally, the findings of this study are not limited to a better understanding of the right to religious freedom alone, but also have implications for the sociology of human rights in general. In a world where challenges to human rights are becoming more numerous, due not only to conflicts and migrations but also to the increase of ethical and cultural pluralisms, the application of new methodologies to assess factors that foster or impede the development of a positive human rights culture is becoming of primary importance. The results of this research demonstrate the importance of building new research instruments that are able to grasp both patterns of social perceptions of human rights and quantitative information, not only about violations of those rights but also about how they are experienced by people of different countries in their daily life. This may be useful both scientifically and practically. On the one hand, for instance, it can help to develop more effective human rights campaigns that take into

account the complexities of societies; on the other hand, it improves methodological reflections in a field in which this topic deserves much more attention (Coomans et al., 2010).

VII. Outline of thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first two report the literature review of the two main variables of this work: religious freedom and political secularism. After outlining the characteristics of religious freedom as expressed in international jurisprudence, **Chapter 1** focuses on sociological approaches to the subject that have emerged over the past two decades. In particular, it stresses the need to investigate religious freedom, not only from the perspective of institutions, but also from that of social perceptions. In closing, the theory on SPRF is presented, describing its strengths and weaknesses, but above all emphasising its capacity to respond in methodological terms to the need to investigate religious freedom (as well as human rights more generally) while holding the institutional together with the individual and social levels.

Chapter 2, on the other hand, focuses on secularism. This part of the text also presents the theoretical framework and hypotheses that will guide the analysis of the data. This chapter differentiates between similar terms such as secularism/secularisation, reviews the criticisms that have been addressed to secularism in recent decades, and outlines the various types of secularism as set forth in the political and sociological literature. Moreover, it describes the theoretical perspective from which we look at the relationship between religious freedom and secularism, presenting our conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 introduces the two contexts (Italy and Croatia) that are the object of this study. The socio-religious characteristics of both will be shown, as well as the different ways in which religious freedom and secularism have historically been interpreted in jurisprudence and society.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology used. The first part explains the epistemological assumptions that guide the research. The second part explains the constitutive steps of a cross-national survey research design and how we approached them. Here, the sampling strategy, the survey instrument, and the data collection methods will be detailed. The third part specifies the variables, the methods for developing measurement scales, and the statistical methods used to analyse the data presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical results of the data analyses that were collected at the Universities of Padua and Zagreb. After describing the two samples, it reports the results of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses for each of the above-mentioned objectives.

Finally, **Chapter 6** is dedicated to the discussion of the results, the limitations of the present research, and the suggestions for further research.

Chapter 1
Religious Freedom: Sociological Approaches

Introduction

This work falls within the sociology of religious freedom. Recently developed, this field of study searches for 'the legal, political, and social determinants of religious freedom' that promote or hinder its implementation in particular contexts (Breskaya et al., 2021a, p. 263). In this subject area, religious freedom emerges as a highly contested (Fox, 2021; Richardson, 2015) and multidimensional concept (Breskaya & Giordan, 2019; Gill, 2008) containing both descriptive and normative aspects (Breskaya et al., 2021).

On the one hand, religious freedom's relationship with the very concept of religion (Hurd, 2015; Sullivan, 2005) and with the complex interplay between religion and human rights (Witte & Green, 2012) have made it foundational for the theoretical study of human rights universalism and religious governance, in a world that is increasingly globalised and politically polarised (Banchoff & Wuthnow, 2011; Hefner, 2015; Hurd, 2015). On the other, its relations with secularism, democracy, discrimination, and socio-economic dynamics have made it an object of empirical investigations that aim to understand what structural conditions—political, social, economic and cultural—lead governments either to foster or violate religious freedom, and how these conditions can help to establish a more or less positive social culture of this fundamental right (for an overview see, Breskaya et al., 2021a).

This chapter is presented in two stages. The first part describes 'what religious freedom is' (Fox, 2021) from the perspective of international documents. The second outlines the peculiarities of a sociological approach to the topic by describing the primary thematic nodes, highlighting the existing gaps in the literature, and defining the theoretical angle from which this work will approach it.

1.1 Religious freedom: international standards

For this study, it is important to articulate, albeit briefly, how religious freedom has been defined in the context of human rights law and the most significant issues at stake. Doing so helps clarify the points of departure of the following discussions and allows a better evaluation of potential tensions among religious freedom, juridical conceptions, and practical experiences.

Since the international discourse of human rights began to take shape, protecting and promoting religious rights and freedoms have been central to the international community's concerns. International law has gradually developed a legal framework to protect freedom of religion and belief globally and to address some of the contemporary world's major controversies regarding religion(s) (Witte & Green, 2012).

The cornerstone of this evolution has been the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, whose provisions have been elaborated by a series of international instruments that have developed more critical and specific protections for religious freedom. In the framework of the United Nations, religious freedom was set out in Article 18 of the UDHR, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 18), and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

At the European level, the Council of Europe guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Moreover, Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention concerns parents' right to ensure their children's education in accordance with their religious convictions, and Article 14 of the Convention prohibits discrimination based on, among other things, religion and opinions. In the European Union (EU) context, the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights (2000) protects human rights in EU Member States. This document protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in Article 10, following the model of the Council of Europe's Convention. In 2013, the Foreign Affairs Council also adopted EU Guidelines for promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief, committing itself to making this right one of the central pillars of its human rights external policy.

On several occasions, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) recalled the importance of protecting freedom of thought, conscience and religion. According to the Court, freedom of religion is considered one of the foundations of a democratic society and has been raised to the rank of a substantive right under the Convention (ECHR, 2022). The number of cases examined by the Court under Article 9 of the European Convention is constantly increasing, thus showing 'the increasing importance of religion and related matters in socio-political discourse' (ECHR, 2022, p.7).

Human rights law's understanding of religious freedom reflects the international arena's change in approach from protection of minorities to a conception of universal individual rights (Scolnicov, 2011, p.11; also Lindkvist, 2017) and embraces 'the modern political principle that one of the human government's main roles is to protect people's religious choices, not to

mandate religious conformity' (Davis, 2002, p.224). First, as with other human rights, the right to freedom of religion and belief applies to individuals and not groups (Scolnicov, 2011, p.2). Individuals are free from coercion, and can have places of worship, display religious symbols, observe holidays and days of rest, appoint clergy, teach and disseminate materials and claim conscientious objection. Parents have the right to ensure their children's religious and moral education. Second, freedom of religion and belief applies to both religious believers and non-believers, thus highlighting the broader value of religious freedom as 'an expression of human freedom of consciousness' (Stoeckl, 2014, p. 6).

Under this body of laws, freedom of religion and belief has two main dimensions: the first refers to the right to choose to believe or not to believe and to change one's belief; the second concerns the right to express or manifest one's religion or belief, individually or in community with others, in public or private, through worship, observance, practice and teaching. While the first part is considered non-derogable, the second might be subject to certain limitations under national laws, aiming to protect public safety and health or the freedoms of others (Prpić, 2018). In the context of human rights law, some issues remain unresolved. First, none of the international instruments mentioned above provides a definition of the terms 'religion' and 'belief'. The Human Rights Committee (HRC), in General Comment n.22, stated that Article 18 of ICCPR protects 'theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief' and is 'not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions'. The ECHR has also intervened in this debate. It states: 'If a personal or collective conviction is to benefit from the right to "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" it must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance' (European Court of Human Rights, 2022, p. 7). The organs of the Convention have explicitly or implicitly declared that the safeguards of Article 9.1 of the Convention apply to the 'major' or 'ancient' world religions which have existed for millennia or for several centuries; to new or relatively new religions or spiritual practices; and to various coherent and sincerely-held philosophical convictions, such as pacifism, attachment to secularism, opposition to abortion and rejection of homosexual unions, veganism, principled opposition to military service, and doctors' opinions on alternative medicine (European Court of Human Rights, 2022, p. 7).

Second, international documents do not address the difficult questions of how the relationship between states and religious institutions should be regulated. Unlike previous bills of rights (e.g., the Virginia Declaration of Rights, 1776; the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, 1789, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Men and Citizens, 1783) which focused more

on 'free exercise' and 'disestablishment' when dealing with religious freedom, the UDHR 'foregrounded the inner freedoms of thought and conscience and never touched on the vexed issue of establishment' (Lindkvist, 2017, p. 6).

Finally, the complexity of religious freedom lies in religion's profound relationship with individual identity and society at large. This often leads this right to overlap with other human rights—such as freedom of expression and association, and with the rights of women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQI people—and, due to the lack of hierarchy among human rights, these tensions are not always easy to resolve. This trend is opening up a large field of research that studies the characteristics of these conflicts and asks how these challenges are reshaping the position of religious freedom in international law and society (e.g., Bielefeldt, 2013; Bielefeldt & Wiener, 2019; Cartabia, 2012; Endsjø, D. Ø., 2020; Eskridge & Wilson, 2018; Malik, 2011; Sullivan, 1991).

1.2 Beyond the legal approach: the sociology of religious freedom

The historical development of the right to religious freedom, its historical foundations, and the monitoring of its applications have been the object of a large cross-disciplinary research body. Compared to law, philosophy or history, sociology had a late start in making religious freedom a research issue, much as it did with human rights in general (Breskaya et al., 2018). Indeed, even while human rights discourse became global in scope, sociologists remained sceptical for a long time, particularly towards the claimed universality of rights and the normativity of assumptions about them (Hynes et al., 2011; Roberts & Somers, 2008; Sjoberg et al., 2001). The result was that, for a long time after the drafting of the UDHR (1948), human rights research was predominantly activist in orientation and legal in its perspective (Breskaya et al., 2018, p. 419). Only in the last three decades has the sociology of human rights developed. It challenges human rights' legal and political understandings by highlighting human rights' historicity and social construction and questioning the validity of other disciplines' progressive and future-oriented approaches (Blokker & Guercio, 2020; Frezzo, 2015). The emergence of the sociology of religious freedom strongly reflects these theoretical developments (Breskaya et al., 2018). As sociology has engaged with human rights to complement political and legal analysis, it has highlighted the structural social conditions producing different human rights norms and meanings (Nash, 2015); in the same way, the sociology of religious freedom has worked to highlight relationships between institutional arrangements and the social, political and cultural factors characterising different societies, at the collective and individual level.

Starting in the 2000s, much sociological research has addressed the multifaceted concept of religious freedom at theoretical and empirical levels. In addition to theoretical discussions on

the relationship between religion(s) and human rights (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Ferrari, 2005; Joas, 2013; Ventura, 2015; Witte & Green, 2012), studies have emerged on the intersectionality of the right to freedom of religion with other human rights (Afkhami, 2000), on the implications for religious freedom's implementation of different State-religion arrangements and cultural and religious factors (Finke & Grim, 2006; Fox, 2012; Van der Vyver & Witte, 1996; Richardson, 2004; Sarkissian, 2015), on legal pluralism (Possamai et al., 2015) on human rights, religion, and migration (Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018), and on the new significance of religious freedom in the governance of religious diversity within contemporary societies or in global politics (Banchoff & Wuthnow, 2011; Hurd, 2015). The result has been a highly heterogeneous and multidisciplinary field of study addressing religious freedom as a right that needs to be analysed as historically situated; namely as a product of the historical, social, political and cultural conditions that characterise its specific profile in each context.

1.3 The social construction of religious freedom

This thesis adopts a constructionist approach to religious freedom, considering it the result of the historical, social, political and cultural conditions that characterise its specific profile in each context. This perspective comes in part from the work of James T. Richardson, the first to use the expression 'sociology of religious freedom' in the article 'The sociology of religious freedom: a socio-structural analysis', which appeared in 2006 in the journal Sociology of Religion. Richardson's (2006) central thesis is that 'the idea of religious freedom itself is a product of certain historical/sociological conditions which led to the embodiment of the notion of freedom of religion' (Richardson, 2006, p.272). Linking empirical research on minorities and new religions with theories of the sociology of religion and law, he shows how the presence of a 'strong State' with a specific type of pluralism and a judicial system with characteristics of independence, pervasiveness and centralisation are the conditions that allow the freedom of religion to develop in a given society. However, although necessary, these conditions are insufficient since each society's religious histories and cultural values also play a specific role. If, on the one hand, indeed, it is only within a religiously pluralistic society that the need for religious freedom emerges, on the other hand, the presence of a historical Church or of a political party that holds a disproportionate amount of power in the system, as well as the political and religious histories of different countries, can become deterrents to the affirmation of religious freedom in some contexts. This is for example the case of the former communist countries of Europe, of which the case of Croatia is part. Today, these countries seem fairly homogeneous from a religious point of view. However, after the fall of the wall and religious 'liberalisation', they found themselves having to deal with new forms of pluralism and claims made not only by historical minorities, but also made both by the so-called 'new religions' and

by those brought by new migratory flows, even if to a much lesser extent than in Western Europe. The response to these growing diversities has been an entrenchment of the historical Churches: although these Churches had made religious freedom an important tool in opposing communism, once the enemy disappeared, they interpreted religious freedom in a self-serving sense, intending to limit the competition of other faiths.

Although it does not directly concern this work, from the perspective of a constructionist approach to religious freedom, the role of courts in religious freedom management (Finke, 2013; Richardson, 2006, 2014, 2015) and the relationship between courts and religious minorities (Fokas & Richardson, 2017) is also of fundamental importance. In Western societies, what Turner (2011) calls the 'management of religions' becomes increasingly central, including more significant government intervention on religious issues and a greater number of policies concerning freedom of faith. However, as religious pluralisation grows, so do the controversies surrounding the role of religion in the public sphere. Governments increasingly refer these disputes to international and local courts. Sociologists of religious freedom call this process the 'judicialisation of religious freedom' (Finke, 2013; Finke & Martin, 2014; Richardson, 2014, 2015). The term echoes the concept of 'judicialisation of politics', which is the subject of an increasing number of studies and describes the growing tendency to entrust conflicts that cannot be resolved politically to the courts.

According to Richardson (2015), we observe a generally positive trend in the courts of the United States and both Western and Eastern European countries, progressively enlarging the protection and the meaning of religious freedom. It is in this context that Richardson (2014) also openly addresses the role of secularism stating that although some see in broadening of the rights of religious minorities the increasingly affirmation of a secularist agenda, it is only through the restriction of dominant religious groups, which is often pursued in rulings by asserting the principle of state neutrality or the separation of religion and state, that an expansion of religious freedom of all religious groups can be achieved (Richardson, 2014, p.14). Nevertheless, courts and judicial systems are multifaceted apparatuses, and legal outcomes result from the interplay among different variables. It is possible to predict that a judicial system will implement religious freedom if it is both pervasive and autonomous. The former describes a judicial system, like that of the United Nations, that 'acts upon many aspects of the lives of individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions within society'. The latter refers to a legal system independent of external conditions. However, these conditions are necessary but not sufficient. Applying a constructivist perspective to law, Donald Black's concept of 'intimacy' becomes key in Richardson's (2006) studies on the legal system. It refers 'to personal, attitudinal, and cultural closeness to participants in the legal institution' (Richardson, 2006, p. 284). Together with economic and social status, which determine an

individual's access to the legal system, intimacy reveals the link between the legal system and society at large. In this perspective, the decision-makers become central. They may be more or less ready to rule in favour of a religious majority or minority in a legal contest based on their values and beliefs. At the same time, religious communities' positions in a given society are also crucial: depending on their status, they will have more or less access to legal systems, the places where, in the judicialisation of religious freedom, decisions concerning it are taken.

1.4 Religious freedom in empirical sociology

The empirical approach to religious freedom is a new enterprise in sociology. Starting from two decades ago, empirical sociologists have also focused on State regulations of religious freedom while adopting a constructionist perspective that keeps legal and political factors together with social, religious, and cultural ones (Grim and Fike, 2007, 2011). These studies have been accompanied by large cross-national data collections, which have allowed them to overcome the lack of empirical evidence that for years 'severely handicapped social sciences' ability to study the topic' (Grim and Finke 2007, p.654; see, e.g., Finke & Mataic, 2018; Finke et al., 2017; Fox, 2015, 2020). In the framework of religious economy theory, using a mix-mode research design, Grim and Finke (2011) showed the impact of religious freedom restrictions on society at large by showing that the more religious freedom is denied, the more religious persecutions occur. At the same time, they discovered that the more social, political, and cultural forces deny religious freedom, the more physical persecutions of religious minorities increase, especially when those forces are allied with the state. By contrast, based on the analysis of data from 158 countries, Finke and Martin (2014) questioned the origins of restrictions on religious freedom, finding that independent judicial systems, high social restrictions, and state favouritism towards particular religions are predictive of more significant restrictions on religious freedom. Moreover, since 'religious freedoms rely on the unique relationship religion holds with the state and larger culture', they stated that 'long-standing cultural and religious divisions often fuel pressures for the state to restrict select religions or all religions' (Finke & Martin, 2014, p. 701).

Analysing the data collected by ARDA, Roger Finke and Brian Grim (2006) found that although only 9% of the world's states do not recognise the right to religious freedom, 86% have at least one law restricting it and 38% more than three. That makes them conclude that there is a significant gap between the formal commitment of many states to protect religious freedom, and its practical implementation, even in states with high degrees of religious diversity.

Starting from these data, Finke (2013) defines religious freedom as 'the unrestricted practice, profession and selection of religion' and systematically explains the reasons for these

restrictions, which are potentially valid for different types of political regimes, both democratic and non-democratic (for non-democratic regimes, see Sarkissian, 2015). Finke distinguishes between the States that intentionally restrict religious freedom and those that fail to protect it. On one hand, privileged relations with one particular religion, as well as political and economic motives, may lead States to restrict religious freedom intentionally. On the other hand, weak judicial systems and what, quoting Alexis de Tocqueville, Finke calls the "tyranny of the majority" may lead States to be inactive in protecting religious freedom, such that restrictions on religion consequently increase.

The work on religious registrations by Finke, Fox and Mataic (2018) is another example of an empirical approach to religious freedom which shed light on the importance to social scientists to analyse the factors underpinning the implementation of legal mechanisms to regulate religion. These scholars show how 'state requirements for religious registration are sharply increasing, are frequently involved in debates over religious freedoms, and are a strong predictor of increased restrictions on religions, especially for minority'. However, going beyond a reading of religious registrations only as a legal issue, they highlight the importance of looking at other structural variables, such as the religious landscape (homogeneity versus diversity) and the socio-political context of states, in order to understand the reasons why states restrict the freedom of minorities and the effects that depend on these decisions.

1.5 Religious freedom and human rights culture

The studies presented so far have analysed religious freedom at the level of governmental policy, investigating what factors lead to its institutionalisation or violation in different contexts. While they have had the merit of providing a large database of quantitative data that was previously lacking, thus permitting empirical verification of questions that had long been asked only on a theoretical level, these studies lacked a societal perspective from which to grasp the variations of religious freedom as a 'value and element of human-rights culture at the more everyday/lived level' (Breskaya & Botvar, 2019, p. 1).

In recent years, sociological works have emerged that explore attitudes, views and perceptions of religion-human rights relations and religious freedom from a cross-national perspective. These studies have been significant as they have outlined a line of research investigating the demographic, socio-religious and socio-political variables that increase or decrease people's support for a vast group of human rights. Sociological concepts such as religious values, beliefs, religious affiliations, faith/spirituality, cultural diversity, and religious socialisation have been tested in their relationships with human rights culture. Concerning religious freedom, Sjöborg (2012) found that, in Sweden, being Christian, Muslim or non-religious influenced attitudes towards certain aspects of religious freedom, such as protecting religious

communities from interference by politicians or the possibility of praying at school. However, in general, the research showed that religious values and beliefs had a low influence on young Swedes' attitudes towards human rights. Religiosity, cultural diversity, and trust in institutions were key variables in Breskaya and Botvar's (2019) work on attitudes toward religious freedom in Norway and Belarus. Their empirical findings showed higher support for religious freedom among those with higher levels of religiosity and those who assigned positive value to cultural diversity. At the same time, they recorded contrasting results between the two countries regarding trust in institutions: whereas in Norway the latter was positively correlated with support for religious freedom, in Belarus the opposite emerged, thus showing the complex interplay between governments and citizens in the formation of a positive culture of human rights (Breskaya & Botvar, 2019, p. 15).

The freedom to wear religious clothing and symbols in schools was at the core of the investigation that Francis et al. (2018) undertook in the UK. They discovered that attitudes towards this freedom were sensitive to a combination of personal (sex), psychological (psychoticism), and religious (personal and public practices) factors. More specifically, concerning religious variables, they found that Christians were more favourable than non-religious toward the rights of other religious groups to display religious clothing and symbols in school.

The analysis of non-religiosity was also part of this group of studies. For instance, "new atheism" was the core variable in Botvar's (2021) work on the impact of non-religiosity on religious freedom and human rights. Breskaya and Giordan (2021), instead, found that in Italy atheist positions towards religious truth claims were less supportive of religious freedom compared to other positions more open to religious doctrines.

The study of religious freedom culture has not been confined to Western countries but has also explored other parts of the world. For example, Adimekwe and Ziebertz (2018) studied young Nigerians' attitudes toward religious freedom, and discovered that, unlike they had expected, the people surveyed showed a highly positive attitude towards this right. Ok and Eren (2013) explored the impact of three attitudes toward religion (religious saliency, openness, and stress) on human rights among adolescents in Turkey.

Instead of contrasting with the previous ones on State regulations, these studies complement them. On the one hand, they open up new questions about the relationship between the governance of religion and the way it is reflected in social and cultural attitudes towards religious freedom and human rights more generally. On the other hand, by going beyond a normative approach, they contribute to the micro and macro analysis of the conditions that religious freedom requires in order to be realised in practice and become a shared cultural norm.

1.6 The Social Perception of Religious Freedom (SPRF) theory

It is in this heuristic approach, of synthesis between structural and individual variables, that the Social Perception of Religious Freedom (SPRF) by Olga Breskaya and Giuseppe Giordan (2019) falls. The two authors' work is part of the strand of studies mentioned above as it contributes to the understanding of religious freedom cultures in comparative fashion. However, compared to the other empirical research, Breskaya and Giordan (2019) focus more on the empirical definition of religious freedom.The starting point of their theoretical work is that religious freedom is a multidimensional concept whose meaning is socially constructed based on structural and individual factors. This idea was already present in Peter Berger's (2014) interpretation of religious freedom as a political or human rights construct and as a tool for individuals' search for meaning in their lives. However, to the previous theories, SPRF adds a proposal for a new methodology of religious freedom analysis that can assess the interaction between subjective experiences of religious freedom and public life, holding together all dimensions of religious freedom in its empirical tests (Breskaya et al., 2021a).

Breskaya and Giordan (2019) suggested that religious freedom is 'constructed at the intersection of five domains of meaning'": 1) religious freedom as individual and religious group autonomy, 2) religious freedom as a social value, 3) religious freedom as a principle of governance between state and religion, 4) religious freedom as a human rights standard, and 5) the social impact of the judicialization of religious freedom. In SPRF's conceptual model, these five dimensions are considered to be dependent variables combined and influenced by independent variables involving socio-political and religious contexts, human rights culture, and different citizenship regimes. According to SPRF, by integrating these different dimensions, it is possible to reveal the 'centers of gravity' of religious freedom for specific groups and individuals, so that their changing meanings can be captured in different contexts. Adopting the SPRF perspective has made it possible to explore the culture of religious freedom in Russia and Italy (Breskaya et al., 2022) and to investigate the influence of variables such as citizenship, religious affiliations, and attitudes toward religious diversity (Breskaya & Giordan, 2021). Furthermore, within the SPRF framework, Breskaya et al. (2021b) produced the only two existing empirical studies that tested the relationships between religious freedom and political secularism from an individual and social perspective (Breskaya et al., 2021a; Breskaya et al, 2022).

1.7 Empirical studies on religious freedom and political secularism

As mentioned in the introduction, there is growing interest in the empirical relationships between political secularism and religious freedom in the field of studies on religious freedom and its various dimensions, although the studies produced are still few in number. For example, to study government-based religious discrimination (GRD), Fox distinguishes between negative-secular states, namely 'those states that are explicitly antireligious and restrict (religion) more', and positive-secular states, those which 'tend to be neutral but tolerant toward religion and will restrict it less'. According to his findings, both of these secular ideologies can involve religious restrictions of majority and minority religions, as much as religious ideologies can, even in democratic states. First of all, both varieties of government secularism do not treat all religious majorities and minorities equally: 'secularism, by itself, will likely motivate equal restrictions on all religions, but when combined with other motivations and causes of GRD that are minority-specific, it will amplify GRD against those minorities' (Fox, 2020). Second, Fox argues that, in some cases, secular states may restrict certain religious practices because they are contrary to secularist ideology: opposition to infant circumcision, ritual slaughter, and Muslim women's veils are primarily found in Western countries and are motivated by secular beliefs that find these religious practices objectionable (Fox, 2021, p.324). This makes him conclude that 'the liberal ideal of religious freedom', instead of being supported by political secularism, is 'often trumped by secular ideology and beliefs' (Fox, 2020).

Adopting a more sociological approach, Fox et al. (2021), in their study of social discrimination against religious minorities in Christian-majority countries, have noted that in Christian countries as religiosity increased, discrimination against Jewish and Muslim minorities decreased, while discrimination against Christian minorities outside the majority denomination increased. The three authors argued that 'this is because secularism is increasingly seen as a significant challenge to Christianity among religious Christians. As a result, they see religious Jews and Muslims as potential allies in this struggle against secularism' (Fox et al., p. 14). The reason why the same principle does not apply to other Christian minorities is that Jews and Muslims 'often appeal to a distinct segment of the population', therefore 'they pose less of a competitive threat to those in the majority religions' (Fox et al., 2021, p. 14).

However, as mentioned in the introduction and as reflected in the studies cited above, most of these works have assumed that political secularism is an ideology 'competing' with religion (Fox, 2022) and have overlooked secularism's multidimensionality while studying it empirically.

In the framework of SPRF's theory, two research projects by Breskaya and colleagues (Breksaya et al., 2021a; Breskaya et al., 2022) acknowledged this limitation and analyzed political secularism as a two-dimensional concept, assessing the effect of each of its components on the social perception of religious freedom in Italy and Russia. Following Kuru (2009), in both studies, the authors distinguished between 'passive' and 'assertive' forms of secularism. The first 'demands that the state play a "passive" role by allowing the public visibility of religion' (Kuru, 2009, p.11, in Breskaya et al. 2021a), the 'second 'requires the state to play an "assertive" role to exclude religion from the public sphere and confine it to the private domain' (Kuru, 2009, p.11, in Breskaya et al. 2021a).

Based on the idea of SPRF's 'five domains of meaning,' Breskaya and colleagues then distinguished between various dimensions of religious freedom. In the Italian study, they distinguished five: 1) individual and religious groups' autonomy; 2) societal value; 3) principle of state-religion governance; 4) international human rights standard; and 5) impact of judicialization. In the Russian study, however, they distinguished only four: 1) individual autonomy; 2) socio-legal aspects of religious freedom; 3) human rights aspects of religious freedom (social); 4) human rights aspects of religious freedom (belief and practice). To these four, they added a fifth variable named 'General perception of religious freedom', which measured the importance attached to religious freedom in general.

Their results showed that, in both cases, passive-type secularism had a significantly more positive impact on religious freedom than active-type secularism, which had no significant influence on the perception of this right.

Conclusions

From the point of view of both legal and sociological approaches, religious freedom has emerged as a multidimensional social phenomenon whose normative meaning is sometimes at odds with empirical experiences. Although widely codified in human rights documents, the institutionalisation and maintenance of religious freedom are strongly influenced by different interpretations of human rights-religion relations, models of State-religion arrangements, types of religious pluralism, forms of judicial systems, majority religious tradition, and historical factors. At the same time, at the level of societal experience, religious freedom has proven to be sensitive to many different aspects of individuals and society, and demands to be empirically and comparatively explored.

Starting from a different definition of religious freedom, which looks at it as a multidimensional category, the concept and the measurement of the social perception of religious freedom

(SPRF) suggest considering the complexity of individuals and contexts in empirical tests. SPRF enables sociologists to investigate the different dimensions of religious freedom, considering their individual and social levels and comparing their interactions in different geographical, socio-political, religious and cultural contexts.

The operational model of SPRF recognises the empirical significance of socio-political variables. On the one hand, the meaning of religious freedom as a principle of religion-state governance draws upon all the research concerning the role of the State and the interaction between secularism, secularisation, types of political regimes and religious freedom. On the other hand, political variables, at the individual (e.g., political orientations, political commitment) and societal level (e.g., political secularism, religion-State relations), have an impact on the production of different SPRF patterns.

This thesis aims to investigate the impact of three socio-political variables on SPRF in Italy and Croatia, while also taking into account religious and political individual factors. In particular, it focuses on attitudes towards two forms of political secularism (institutional and ideological) and religious establishment. Concerning religious freedom, following the SPRF model, in our analysis, we will look at it as a multidimensional phenomenon and of these dimensions we will take into account three: religious freedom as societal value, religious freedom as individual value, and religious freedom as the freedom to express religion. The first represents the association between religious freedom and democracy, including non-discrimination against minorities, legal equality, and freedom of expression, thus merging legal with social aspects. The second concerns the freedom of each person to search for their own spiritual truth, and to pursue their own spiritual fulfilment. Finally, the third takes into account practices, referring to the right to teach, publish, establish religious groups, and express views in the media, thus highlighting the most controversial aspects of religious freedom and challenging the idea of religious freedom as an individual right. All these three dimensions have been chosen because their contents are considered strictly related to the conception of political secularism we have adopted in this work. The next chapter will discuss the reference literature on secularism and establishment and their relationship with religious freedom. Moreover, it will further present the theoretical framework and hypothesis used in this research.

Chapter 2
Political Secularism: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

Introduction

The term "secularism" was first coined by the English thinker and activist George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) in 1851. He described it as 'a code of duty about this life, founded on considerations purely human and intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable' (Holyoake, 2021, p. 19). He aimed to build a positive philosophy of free thought—distinguishing it from theology—in which secularism represented the 'rules human reason may supply for the independent conduct of life' (Holyoake, 2021, p. 19). In Holyoake's account, secularism, when applied to society and politics, meant their independence from supernatural truth. In the same period, however, another influential thinker and leader of the secularist movement in England, Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), gave another anti-religious version of secularism, promoting it as a substitute for faith, the only way to reach a new secular order[2]. Today, the struggle around the concept and the practice of secularism continues. The word has assumed multiple meanings and may indicate 'a worldview, an ideology, a political doctrine, a form of political governance, a type of moral philosophy, or a belief that the scientific method is sufficient to understanding the world in which we live' (Jakelić, 2010a, p.1).

Our approach focuses on the political meaning of the concept. Its minimal definition claims the separation of religion and politics, state and religious institutions. Political secularism has been the subject of extensive cross-disciplinary investigation. However, its definition is still complex as it takes on different meanings depending on the field of study in which it is defined and the historical contexts in which political secularism is expressed.

In this chapter, we retrace the primary meanings attributed to secularism and the most important critiques addressed to it. The aim is to find the most appropriate empirical definition that, while taking into account the multidimensionality of the concept, may also highlight the complexity of its relationships with religious freedom, at least at the level of society.

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[2]For an account of the differences between Holoyake and Bradlaugh, see Cady, L., Hurd, S.E. (2010).

Beyond just looking at political secularism's sociological inquiries, given the wide range of disciplines that have dealt with it, the chapter will also make forays into other fields of study, such as philosophical and political studies.

First, we will distinguish political secularism from often overlapping concepts such as secularity and secularisation. Secondly, we will highlight the main criticisms that have been made of political secularism as a hegemonic project and a normative concept that cannot be applied to empirical reality. Thirdly, we will look at how it has been defined in political and sociological studies, highlighting the (still few) empirical studies that have analysed it. Finally, we will present the theoretical framework and hypotheses guiding our data analysis work.

2.1 Secular, secularisation, and secularism

The secular, secularisation, and secularism represent strongly interrelated and empirically overlapping categories and processes and are also often used interchangeably in political and sociological literature. However, their empirical convergence and common roots should not obscure the fact that they operate in different conceptual frameworks and have different historical trajectories (Calhoun et al., 2011, p. 6). If 'secularism' is best defined as a political doctrine or worldview, 'secularisation' is a theory that designates a historical process that characterises the relationship between religion and modernity, and the 'the secular' is an epistemic category designed to distinguish the world of the religious from that in which religion is absent or, according to teleological and normative theories, superseded.

Secular

While secularisation and secularism have been the objects of huge debates in social sciences debate, the term 'secular' was taken more for granted, and has often been used without adequate conceptualisation. The secular may be defined as a modern epistemic category serving 'to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from "the religious"' (Casanova, 2011, p.54). It therefore historically precedes and conceptually grounds the formation of both the concepts of secularism and secularisation (Asad, 2003; Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, 2011; Zuckerman & Shook, 2017).

Firstly, the secular historically precedes secularism because, whereas the latter is a product of the Enlightenment, the former originated in mediaeval Christian theology. Etymologically it comes from the Latin word *saeculum* that originally meant "an indefinite period of time" (Casanova, 2011, p.56). However, it becomes one of the two poles—the religious and the

secular—that structured Christendom, dividing the world of spiritual salvation from that of profane materiality. To secularise meant to 'make worldly', with reference to the conversion of religious people or things into secular ones[3]. Secondly, the secular grounds secularism because it establishes an epistemic difference with the religious, thus making the theoretical and political separation between these two realms conceivable.

However, despite their conceptual distinction, there is a link between the secular and religion such that to understand the former, one cannot disregard the latter (Casanova, 2009; Taylor, 2007). In his book *Formations of the secular* (2003), using a Foucauldian approach, Talal Asad traces the genesis of the concept of the secular and emphasises its profound connection with religion. This is a link, however, which ends neither in a relationship of continuity nor one of rupture. According to Asad, the concept of the secular is plural and historically unstable, definable more by its 'shadows' than by its properties. If, in the context of modernity, the term secularism designates a political project that has characterised the Western world, the secular holds together 'certain behaviours, knowledges and sensibilities' present in modern life in many contexts, including non-Western ones. For instance, as Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt (2011) write about the resistance of many Islamic contexts to the processes of secularisation and institutionalisation of secularism, secularity – which they conceptualize ' in terms of the cultural meanings underlying the differentiation between religion and non-religious spheres' - does not depend on the absence from Islamic thought and politics of a differentiation between the realms of the religious and the secular—a differentiation of which the concept of secularity is the bearer—but rather on the omnipresence of religion (Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, 2011, p. 882).

In his magisterial work *A secular age* (2007), Charles Taylor gives three definitions of secularity, holding together the term's political and individual meanings. According to him, secularity is a term that describes some processes related to modernity in the West and North Atlantic world, even though, in different ways, it extends even to other parts of the world. The first meaning refers to public space 'allegedly emptied of God, or any reference to ultimate reality' (Taylor, 2007, p. 2). Whereas in the past political organisations were typically in some way connected with God, in the modern Western world, they are free from this connection, with Churches separated from political institutions and religion rendered essentially a private matter. The second meaning, by contrast, concerns the idea of secularisation, that is, the diminishing of religious beliefs and practices. Finally, the last, and the most important for

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[3] All this about the historical origins of secularity is taken from Casanova (1994, 2011).

Taylor, focuses on the conditions of beliefs. As he writes: 'The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace' (p.3).

Casanova (2011) also addresses the changes that have concerned secular-religion relations in modern times. He, too, defines secularity as an epistemic category with a multidimensional character. First, there is political secularity, which reflects the process of secularisation that makes us take for granted that modernity means being secular. Second, there is individual secularity, which can take three forms: *mere secularity*, the phenomenological experience of living in a world in which religion is one option among others; *self-sufficient* and *exclusive secularity*, the phenomenological experience whereby living without religion is considered a natural condition of modernity; and *secularist secularity*, the phenomenological experience of experiencing religion as a form of oppression from which one must actively free oneself, for the flourishing of humanity. According to Casanova, the paradox of the modern world is that, while secularity was originally considered a residual category compared to the religious, today it is considered a reality *tout court*, a taken-for-granted mode of being modern, for individuals and society, compared to which it is "the religious" that has become a superfluous additive.

Secularisation

As with secularity, secularisation can also be addressed in the plural. The variety of secularisation refers to its internal dimensions and its multiple historical and geographical expressions. Nevertheless, far from being its unquestioned and inherent characteristic, the multiplicity of secularisation resulted from a path representing the crisis of its paradigm that had predominated in the social sciences for a large part of the 20th century.

Until the 1990s, within the social sciences, secularisation was the undisputed theory on the relationship among religion, politics, and society. The theoretical roots of the theory can be traced back to the works of Durkheim and Weber. Although neither of them were ideologically biassed against religion, and although they came to different general conclusions about the function of religion in society, both believed that religion would not survive the onslaught of modernity. To simplify, the idea was that the progress of modernisation—understood as bureaucratisation, industrialisation, schooling, and urbanisation—would lead to a gradual and inevitable decline of the religious factor in the political, social, and even personal spheres. Depending on whether religion was understood in its institutional, belief, or practice aspects, more emphasis was given to some aspects or others of secularisation. If some scholars,

therefore, favoured the idea of the diminishing of religion's influence in reason of the functional differentiation of modern societies (Dobbeleare, 1985), others emphasised the diminution of beliefs and the generalised process of desacralisation of the world (Berger, 1967; Wilson, 1966).

Over time, however, empirical evidence showed that what was considered a paradigm, with universal and almost teleological features, was unreliable in explaining the reality of countries beyond the European, North Atlantic, and of Western worlds. This especially challenged the idea of secularisation as a unitary model, leading to the limits of the concept's validity being increasingly defined (Martin, 1978). The religious revolution in Iran, religious revitalisation in post-communist Europe, the emergence of the American Christian Right, and Liberation theology in Latin America all led to a radical questioning of the idea that religion would disappear from the modern world. Moreover, the case of the United States, one of the most industrialised countries in the world but also one of those with the highest number of believers and practitioners, showed the exceptionality of the European case, on which secularisation theory had been based, emphasising, even more, its theoretical biases (Berger et al., 2008). The result was that some scholars gave the theory up for dead (Berger, 1999; Stark & Finke, 2000), while others proposed an extensive revision of it (e.g., Casanova, 1994; Dobbeleare, 2002).

Three aspects of traditional secularisation theory have been most criticised: (a) its alleged universalism, (b) its underlying process theory, and (c) its modernist normative bias. As mentioned in the opening, the two responses to this 'crisis' have been to highlight the multidimensionality of the concept of secularisation and the logic of its empirical variations.

For instance, Karel Dobbelaere (2002) has identified three primary dimensions of secularisation. The first, which refers to the macrosociological level, concerns the process of structural and functional differentiation of institutions. The second concerns the change of the religious universes themselves, that is, their tendency to become mundane in the perspective of analysis opened by Weber and Berger. The third dimension refers to the micro-sociological level, as it concerns individuals' behaviours—religious practice and belonging—and beliefs. The distinction between the different dimensions makes it possible to assume that they may vary to different degrees and even in different directions from each other. According to José Casanova (1994), too, secularisation theory can be divided into three parts, namely, the modern processes of differentiation between the secular and religious spheres, the decline of subjective religiosity, and the process of privatisation of religion. According to Casanova, while the first dimension is an indispensable element of secularisation and the second also has empirical validations, the third dimension is most reliable both theoretically and historically: unlike

secular differentiation, which remains a structural trend that serves to define the very structure of modernity, the privatisation of religion is a historical option, a 'preferred option' to be sure, but an option nonetheless. Privatisation is preferred internally from within religion as evinced by general pietistic trends, processes of religious individuation, and the reflexive nature of modern religion. Privatisation is constrained externally by structural trends of differentiation which force religion into a circumscribed and differentiated religious sphere. Privatisation is mandated ideologically by liberal categories of thought which permeate modern political and constitutional theories (Casanova, 1994, p. 39).

Unlike Dobbeleare and Casanova, to reframe the secularisation theory, instead of focusing on dimensions, Inglehart and Norris (2004) opt to explain the logic underlying its variations. The two authors assume that 'societies worldwide differ greatly in their levels of economic and human development and socio-economic equality—and consequently, in the extent to which they provide their people with a sense of existential security'. Drawing on a vast body of empirical data resulting from the four waves of the World Values Survey carried out from 1981 to 2001 in eighty societies, covering all the world's major faiths, Inglehart and Norris show that religiosity in the world is on the rise and persists most strongly among vulnerable populations, especially those in poorer nations and failed states, who face personal risks to survival. Exposure to physical, social, and personal risks drives religiosity. In contrast, religious practices, values, and beliefs have been systematically erased among the more prosperous strata of wealthy nations.

(Political) secularism

Compared with the concept of secularity and secularisation, which are, respectively, epistemic and analytical categories, secularism is more normative in nature. According to Casanova (2009):

> Secularism refers more broadly to a whole range of modern secular worldviews and ideologies that may be consciously held and explicitly elaborated into philosophies of history and normative-ideological state projects, into projects of modernity and cultural programs. Or, alternatively, it may be viewed as an epistemic knowledge regime that may be unreflexively held and phenomenologically assumed as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality, as a modern doxa or as an "unthought". Moreover, modern secularism also comes in multiple historical forms, in terms of different normative models of legal-constitutional separation of the secular state and religion, or in terms of the different

types of cognitive differentiation between science, philosophy, and theology, or in terms of the different models of practical differentiation between law, morality, and religion (Casanova, 2009, p.1051).

In this thesis, among the various 'dimensions' (Campbell et al., 2018) or 'facets' (Beard et al., 2013) of secularism, we are interested in the political one. Political secularism is a key concept that structures relations between religions and the political sphere. From the institutional perspective, in its minimal definition, it calls for the separation between religion and politics, State and religious institutions (Jakelić, 2022). Its core value is the 'political autonomy' of the State from 'religious authority, religious purposes or religious reasons' (Modood, 2015, p.1). An autonomy 'lies in the distinction between a private sphere of values and beliefs, where religious organisations can exercise their moral authority and a public sphere based on recognising shared rules'. (Giorgi, 2007, p. 37)

From a sociological point of view, the emergence of political secularism is intertwined with the secularisation process. However, for some, political secularism is the ideological legitimation of the institutional differentiation between the religious and the political sphere due to secularisation; for others, it is a driving force leading to secularisation (Fox, 2015). In an effort of conceptual clarification, Jean Baubérot (2013) distinguishes two different processes: *secularisation* and *laicisation*. The first process refers to a socio-religious change, shifting from 'religious culture' to 'religious belief'. The second process, by contrast, led to the dissociation of the political field as the domain of power (with its aspect of obligation and coercion) from the religious field, which is reduced to mere authority. It is prosecuted mainly with juridical means. According to Baubérot, the two processes should be kept analytically distinct, and are not the consequence of one another, but can be composed differently depending on the political and religious histories of the countries in which they occur. Indeed, in some countries, such as the United Kingdom, the process of secularisation has dominated over that of laicisation; in others, such as France, Turkey, or Italy, the opposite has happened. In Western Europe and the United States, political secularism's first impulse is democratic: creating a public sphere open to all individuals as equal citizens, regardless of their particular identities (Jakelić, 2022). In this perspective, political secularism represents a mode of organising contemporary political communities, addressing and managing their growing religious and 'moral pluralism' (Maclure & Taylor, 2011; see also Milot, 2011). Historically, there are two reference models, countries in which political secularism has emerged in its most developed version: the United States model and the France *laicité* (Bhargava, 2013, pp. 81-83;

Modood & Sealy, 2019, p. 7). Both models maintain that the state must be separated from religion. However, while in the French model, this exclusion is one-way, so that religion must not interfere with the state, but the state has the legitimacy to intervene in the religious domain, in the United States the exclusion is reciprocal: neither the state nor religion can intervene in the domain of the other (Barghava, 2013).

French and U.S. political secularism are the products of two very different religious histories. In France, it was the product of a conflict between the state and the Catholic Church, which found its topical historical moments in the French Revolution and the Third Republic (1879-1905). In contrast, in the United States, the separation between Church and State was the solution to guaranteeing peaceful coexistence in a country that was being built on great religious diversity. As Kuru (2007) wrote: "The lack of an *ancien régime* and the presence of religious diversity were primary factors in the emergence of secularism and religious freedom in the U.S. as a gradually evolving political process" (p.587).

The two models thus start from different assumptions. In France, the focus is on the value of equality between religious and the non-religious citizens, equality that lies in a neutral public sphere, where religion is considered a private matter and much weight is accorded to freedom *from* religion. In the United States, on the other hand, religious freedom has the most important place. Here, rather than *privatisation*, the core concept is *non-officialisation*: the strict separation of religion and state corresponds to a public sphere not neutral, but plural, where the presence of different religious beliefs and practices is encouraged. Both models feature weaknesses: while the French model risks turning into an anti-pluralist regime of governance of religion, characterised by the disregard of the intimate value that religious identities hold for those who bear them, the United States model, can 'live comfortably with liberal, Protestantised, individualised, and privatised religions', but it is not able to resolve the problem of domination of one religion over others and 'has fewer resources to cope with religions that mandate a greater public or political presence, or that have a strong communal orientation' (Barghava, 2013, p.83)

In Weberian terms, France and the United States can be regarded as two 'ideal types' of political secularism, with which both political secularism's critics and its defenders have been confronted.

2.2 Critiques of secularism

Today, among scholars belonging to different disciplines it is commonplace to talk about the 'crisis' of political secularism. This crisis intertwines empirical and normative aspects. On the

one hand, it lies in political secularism's historical crisis. The fall of the Soviet bloc and the violent destruction of the former Yugoslavia, the rise of the religious Right in the United States, migrations bringing different religions, and the subsistence of established churches even in liberal democratic countries, are all phenomena that challenge the idea of secularism as a universal and progressive principle. On the other hand, political secularism's empirical reality has led scholars to conceptually criticise it, at the descriptive and normative level, by questioning its validity and very existence, and its normative ties with the development of more just and egalitarian societies.

It is possible to identify some trends in these criticisms. They mainly concern political secularism's origins, its supposed neutrality and egalitarian purposes, and its central role in democracy[4]. First of all, scholars coming from different national and cultural backgrounds have started to stress how political secularism's Western and Christian origins have undermined its presumed neutrality and universality, making it inapplicable to non-Western contexts, except at the price of new forms of colonialism (e.g., Carrasco Mirò, 2020; Madan, 1998). The anthropologist Talal Asad (1993; 2003), one of the most influential theorists of the secular, described secularism as a Western project, which has established itself globally, and that aims not only to impose biassed conceptions of religion but also to reconceptualise ethics and politics in ways unshared in other parts of the world (Asad, 2003). According to him, the idea of religion entailed by secularism is tailored to the Protestant conception of religion which emphasises beliefs instead of practices and the idea of individual freedom in religious commitments. Saba Mahmood (2016) applies Asad's interpretation of political secularism to the Middle East and shows how modern secular governance, with its promises of religious liberty and minority rights, has exacerbated rather than appeased religious tensions in post-colonial Egypt. From the perspective of international relations, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2004) also understands secularism as an "exercise of power" that aspires "to serve as a universal grammar of public life that defines itself by identifying and marginalising the religious, and in particular the Islamic" (p.117). Hurd describes the implications of this project for the foreign policy of the United States by analysing the U.S. behaviour during the Iranian Revolution. According to her, this case shows the colonising power of secularism, which the

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[4]Some authors have classified the different critics of secularism. Slavica Jakelić (2022) distinguishes between 1) the critique of secularism's Christian Western roots; 2) the critique of secular understanding of authority and agency; and 3) the critique of secularism as a legitimation of the nation-state. Cécile Laborde (2017) also identifies three critiques of the liberal approach underlying secularism. These are a semantic, a Protestant, and a realistic critique.

U.S. took as 'the legitimising principle for the suppression of Iranian politics and practice' (p. 131).

Secondly, besides its role in non-Western contexts, critics called into question political secularism's supposed neutrality even in increasingly diverse Western societies. The liberal idea of secularism was to find common ground in plural societies to guarantee the religious freedom of all and to downplay social conflicts motivated by different religious or cultural worldviews. It followed two basic principles: the state should not be informed by any particular religious doctrine and must guarantee religious freedom for all. However, its strict normative separation of religion from politics and the liberal distinction between public and private, with religion relegated to this second realm, have started to appear more compatible with non-religious ways of living and thinking and with secularised forms of Christianity than with non-Western religions, with severe implications for equal citizenship and religious freedom of minorities. According to Kastoryano and Modood (2007), to consider the public sphere as morally neutral means to trace a distinction between politics/law and culture that does not exist in reality: 'no regime stands outside culture, ethnicity or nationality, and changes in these will need to be reflected in the political arrangements of the regime' (p.20). This blindness entails that citizens sharing the national religious culture that historically shaped the public sphere will find their identities more adequately reflected in the 'political identity of the regime', a disadvantage for religious minorities who will feel excluded.

Craig Calhoun has made similar claims (2008). He writes: 'Rethinking the implicit secularism in conceptions of citizenship is important…because continuing to articulate norms of citizen participation that seem biased against religious views will needlessly drive a wedge between religious and non-religious citizens. This would be most unfortunate at a time when religious engagement in public life is particularly active, and when globalisation, migration, economic stresses, and insecurity all make strengthening commitments to citizenship and participation in shared public discourse vital' (Calhoun, 2008, p.88).

Finally, the resurgence of religion, registered by scholars such as José Casanova (1994) or Gilles Kepel (1991), and the crisis of secularisation theory (Costa, 2019) have made scholars think that societies can be modern and democratic even while maintaining a certain degree of friendliness with religion (Bader, 1999; Driessen, 2010; Laborde, 2017). The concept of 'multiple modernities,' elaborated by the sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt, (2000) has begun to gain approval among sociologists and political scientists, who have employed it to study the relationships between religion and politics in contemporary democracies. Eisenstadt's basic idea was to challenge the "homogenising and hegemonic" Western program of modernity by

showing that modern Western and non-Western societies display different practical and ideological modernity patterns at local and transnational levels. Applied to the religious/secular discourse, this meant acknowledging the existence of different ways to interpret the relationship between the secular and the religious in a variety of modern environments (see the concept of 'multiple secularities' in Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, 2011) and the potentially different roles of religions in modernity and democracy, in Western and non-Western societies. Eisenstadt's framework, therefore, has been widely and successfully used in analysing the rise of ethnic and religious nationalism (Spohn, 2003), the religious factor in European Union enlargement (Byrnes & Katzenstein, 2006; Spohn, 2009) or in other continents (Rosati & Stoeckl, 2012).

In the same way, the 'multiple modernities' concept has been used to reconfigure the liberal relationship between religion, secularism, and democracy. From the perspective of comparative politics, indeed, Alfred Stepan (2000, 2011) proposed to replace the concept of secularism with those of 'multiple secularisms' and 'two tolerations'. The former suggests that there does not exist only one model of separation between religion and the State that is compatible with democracy. The latter replaces the term secularism with a form of mutual respect according to which 'religious institutions should not have constitutionally privileged prerogatives that allow them to mandate public policy to democratically elected governments' and 'individuals and religious communities…must have complete freedom to worship privately' (Stepan, 2000, p. 39). Moreover, writes Stepan, since democracy is, among other things, 'a system of conflict regulation that mellows open competition over the values and goals that citizens want to advance', this means that 'as long as groups do not use violence, do not violate the rights of other citizens, and stay within the rules of the democratic game, all groups are granted the right to advance their interests, both in civil society and in political society' (Stepan, 2000, p. 39). Therefore, for a democracy to function, it is not important 'to take the truths of religion off the political agenda' (Rawls, 1980, p. 151, in Stepan, 2000, p. 40) but rather to respect the boundaries prescribed by the principle of 'twin toleration', which far frombeing predetermined is the result of political and social constructions. Beyond showing that 'the degree of secularism is not always a degree of democracy' (Stepan, 2011, p.120), Stepan (2000) aims to challenge the prejudicial idea that there are some religious traditions *per se* incompatible with democracy, such as Islam or Orthodox Christianity. Central to his thought was the idea of multivocality of religion characterising even Western Christianity. The history of Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism demonstrates that all these doctrines have placed obstacles in the way of democracy, and that democratic achievements were the results of

internal struggles conducted by political and spiritual activists within the boundaries of their own religions. According to Stepan, this can also be the case of the Islamic religion. While , indeed, there are no Arab Islamic countries with democratic regimes, it is also correct that, if we take into account people residing in Europe, North America, and Australia, about half of the world's Muslims (around 600 million if one considers Indonesia) live under democratic-style political systems. This leads him to conclude that 'when we consider the question of non-Western religions and their relationship to democracy, it would seem appropriate not to assume univocality but to explore whether these doctrines contain multivocal components that are usable for (or at least compatible with) the political construction of the twin tolerations' (Stepan, 2000, p. 44).

Michel Driessen (2010) gives statistical substance to Stepan's claim. He distinguishes between two dimensions of Church-state relations. The first measures the extent to which states restrict the free exercise of religion; the second, on the contrary, measures the degree of friendliness or "identification" between state and religious institutions. According to him, in conditions of democratic transition and consolidation, although some degree of separation between Church and State remains crucial to protect the working of democracy, there is a wide range of Church-State arrangements that, even if they allow one religion to have a public role and political rights, are also respectful of democratic freedoms and minorities rights.

2.3 Political secularism in Europe

In the last decades, another challenge to political secularism has come from the acknowledgement of its multiple forms. Scholars show that it is not possible to talk about this concept as singular (Cady & Hurd, 2010), but the empirical reality is described by 'multiple secularisms' (Stepan, 2011).

According to this perspective, Modood (2010, see also Modood & Sealy, 2019) criticises the idea that the U.S. disestablishment model and French *laïcité* represent the two mainstream versions of Western secularism. According to him, they are two 'exceptional' cases, as most Western Europe countries are characterised by softer and more pragmatic modes of separation between religion and the state:

> For many intellectuals, especially political theorists, secularism or Western secularism has been understood in terms of the religious-liberty secularism of the USA and/or the equality of citizenship secularism or laïcité of France. As a matter of fact, neither of these models approximates particularly closely to church-state relations amongst West European countries beyond France, where a variety

of patterns of legal constitutional and non-legal constitutional regulation and relations can be found. In Germany, the Catholic and Protestant Churches are constitutionally recognised corporations, for whom the state does not only collect voluntary taxes but the church welfare organisations, taken together, are the largest recipients of funding to non-state welfare providers (Lewicki, 2014). Denmark has a system of classes of recognition, producing a tiered set of rights and privileges in relation to the state (Laegaard, 2012). In Belgium, a number of religions have constitutional entitlements and a national Council of Religions enjoys the support of the monarch. Norway, Denmark and England each have an 'established' Church (even if only 'weakly' established), Sweden had one till 2001 and Finland has two. In Italy, Ireland and Poland the Catholic church is powerful and influential, albeit distinct from state structures (for alternative typologies, see Ferrari, 2012; Koenig, 2009; Madeley, 2009; Stepan 2011). Yet despite these connexions between state and religion, it would be difficult to dispute that these states are not amongst the leading secular states in the world – more precisely, one could only dispute that if one had some narrow, abstract model of secularism that one insisted on applying to the varieties of empirical cases (Modood & Sealy, 2019, pp.11-12).

He calls this Western European form of political secularism 'moderate secularism' and contrasts it with another that it defines as 'radical'. The two secularisms entail different interpretations of separation features. The first argues for an absolute separation of religion and the state, while the second admits points of symbolic, institutional, policy, and fiscal linkages with religion (p. 5).

'Moderate secularism' can take different forms and it is not necessarily in contrast with establishment. In Europe, the complex landscape of relations between religion and State is represented by the tripartite model proposed by legal scholars to describe it (see Ferrari, 1995; Robbers, 2005) and taken up by sociologists and political scientists[5]. They believe European religion and State relations correspond to three models or systems: 1) *establishment*; 2) *strict separation or disestablishment*; and 3) the *cooperation* or *concordatarian* model. These patterns can be represented as a continuum from the states that recognize one faith as a state religion to those that apply a strict concept of neutrality and separation between State and religion. In the middle, many different forms of State-religion cooperation link religion and the state through different and alternative linkages (Stoeckl, 2020).

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[5] In fact, sociologists have rather overlooked this topic. For a partial bibliography of sociological inquiries on Church-State relations see Zrinščak, S. (2011, pp. 157-184).

Establishment is characterised by a strong link between the church and the state. These links are recognized by constitutional law and the legal system, in which the officially recognized religious community may be defined as a 'folk', 'state', 'national', or 'established' church (Sandberg & Doe, 2007). Within this ideal type, it is possible to distinguish between a *strong establishment*—in Europe, this is the case of Serbia and Greece—and a *weak establishment*, which means the constitutional and legal establishment of one state church, and formal and substantive recognition of religious freedom and pluralism. Examples of this latter type are England, Scotland, Norway, and Denmark. To this bipartite model, one may add the *plural establishment regime.* This latter is characterised by the official constitutional and/or legal recognition of more than one state church, and the only example in Europe is Finland (Bader, 1999).

Strict separation or disestablishment, by contrast, supposes that the State is neutral toward religions and guarantees equal rights to all of them. There is no constitutional provision for cooperation between religion and the State, either legal or financial. France is the most representative case in Europe, even though 'it would be wrong to say that the French state does not cooperate with the churches at all in areas like religious instruction, assistance, and finance' (Ferrari, 1995).

Finally, the *cooperation* model usually recognises more than one religion as a cooperation partner of the state. It is 'characterised by a simple separation of state and church coupled with the recognition of a multitude of common tasks which link state and church activity, which are often recognised in the form of agreements, treaties, and Concordats' (Sandberg, 2008). These tasks can concern regulating and financing church and state education, welfare, and care. This model includes Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Portugal, and the Baltic States.

Many factors influence the imposition of one of the three models of religion-State arrangements, and these factors are closely related to each country's cultural and religious history. They range from the presence of dominant religions and their strong ties with national and ethnic identities in many parts of Europe (Madeley, 2003), to the need, due to migration, to increasingly manage religion in order to downplay social conflicts (Richardson, 2006).

These three models are not exhaustive. On the one hand, they emphasise the formal aspects without accounting for their content, that is, 'the legal powers given to churches and the protections afforded to individual believers' (Ferrari, 1995, p. 421). On the other hand, they do not consider either that even within the same national unit, federal, state, and local legislation

can vary (Bader, 1999) or that also the same church can act by interpreting all three models, depending on political convenience (see Stoeckl, 2020)[6].

They do, however, give a measure of the existing variety of state/religion relations in Europe, the recognition of which, combined with other processes such as, for example, religious revitalisation in the countries of post-communist Europe, forces a review of the normative approach with which the relations between religion and state/politics have been thought of in Western democracies and, more generally, in the modern world.

2.4 Political secularism as a multidimensional concept: political and sociological perspectives

In the previous paragraphs, we have dealt with political secularism from an institutional perspective. We have seen how the separation between State and religion has been interpreted in different Western countries and discussed the main critiques that have been moved to more normative versions of political secularism. In this paragraph, we will look at how it has been conceptualised in political and sociological studies. Here, political secularism is often understood as an 'ideology': it refers to 'the arrangements of the institutional separation of politics/the state and religion as well as to their ideological legitimizations' (Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, 2012, p.881). As in the case of political secularism as a doctrine of the state, political secularism as an ideology can also take different forms, some more in competition with religion, others more inclusive of it, both in the political and public spheres. In political science, these ideologies are analysed from the point of view of states (Fox, 2015a) and elites (Kuru, 2009), while in sociology the focus is on social actors, understood as states, groups, but especially individuals (Baubérot, 2013).

The political scientist Jonathan Fox (2015a, 2018) defines political secularism as 'an ideology or set of beliefs advocating that religion ought to be separate from all or some aspects of politics, government, and/or public life' (Fox, 2015a). However, according to him, 'there is a significant amount of disagreement among political secularists on exactly what type of government-religion relationship is mandated by secularism' (Fox, 2018, p. 171). He argues that the types of political secularist ideologies which exist in Western democratic settings may be divided into four groups. Above all, there is the French-type *laicist* model. It forbids the State to support religion and limits the free expression of religion in the public sphere.

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[6]Kristina Stoeckl (2020) shows how the Russian Orthodox Church acts together as a state partner, as a minority in search of cooperation, and as an antagonist of the state engaged in a culture war.

Restrictions on religions are applied not only to minorities, but also to the activities of majority religions, yet private expressions of religion are generally left alone, as one of the purposes of this type of political secularism is 'to relegate religion to the private sphere' (Fox, 2018, p. 174). By contrast, the other three conceptions are variations of the idea that the State must stay neutral towards religion. The first is *absolute separationism* which focuses mainly on the State and advocates for the complete marginalisation of religion from the government. More specifically, this type of political secularism 'demands that the government neither support nor interfere with religion in any way' (Fox, 2018, p. 172). However, within this model, many different positions exist about the proper role of religion in the political and public sphere. One of the empirical expressions of this state-religion arrangement is the United States, where, as we have seen, although a strict separation between religion and State is promoted, the participation of religious individuals and groups in civil society also is encouraged, as long as their actions do not violate others' freedom and the law. The key variable of the third model, the *neutral political concern,* is by contrast equal treatment for all religions. According to this purpose, the government must not hinder or support any conception of life more than others, and the government's interference *with* or *in* religion "are acceptable as long as they are applied equally to all religions" (Fox, 2015a). The last model is called the *exclusion of ideals* and shares the same value of neutrality with the previous one, yet it focuses on intents instead of on outcomes, therefore 'religions can in practice be treated differently as long as there is no specific intent to support or hinder a specific religion' (Fox, 2015a).

Although 'ideology' is a key term in Fox's understanding of secularism, he does not explicitly define it. Instead, Ahmet Kuru (2009) does. From the perspective of comparative politics, he argues that states' policies toward religion are the result of historical struggles between different types of secularist 'ideologies' which he understands as 'sets of ideas related to consistent utopia', presenting themselves as 'formal, explicit and relatively consistent' and articulated by 'political elites'. In secular states, the main secularist ideologies are represented by what Kuru calls 'assertive' and 'passive' forms of secularism. Both entail separation between State and religion, yet while 'assertive secularism' demands that the State take an active role in confining religion to the private sphere, 'passive secularism' asks the state to allow the presence of religion in the public sphere. 'Assertive" secularism is a "comprehensive doctrine", whereas "passive secularism" mainly prioritises state neutrality toward such doctrines' (Kuru, 2009, p. 11). Kuru's distinction has a heuristic value because it allows us to understand the various dimensions of political secularism by evaluating its effects on the formation of social processes, and because it sheds light on the complexity of political secularism as an empirical category.

In fact, according to him, states and the models of secularism they represent are not monolithic. On the contrary, in a given country, the dominant type of secularist ideology, passive or assertive, is in 'a constant struggle with opposing ideologies' and because of this struggle, 'state policies towards religion experience several exceptions, contradictions, and changes' (Kuru, 2009, p. 14).

Sociologist Jean Baubérot also challenges the idea of secularism classified in terms of monolithic models. In his perspective, secularism can be subdivided into four 'ideal-typical indicators': freedom of conscience (and its different relations with freedom of religion), equality (more or less strong) of rights without religious conditions (principle of non-discrimination), separation, and neutrality (and the different ways of interpreting it) (Baubérot, 2013). Conceptually, these four aspects are strongly interrelated, however, social actors—by which he means states, groups, or individuals—may have different visions of secularism and favour one or the other of its aspects, depending on personal interests (2013, p. 35). He writes about the French model: 'There is no French model of secularism, but different representations according to social actors'. Specifically, in France, he identifies seven of them: 1) anti-religious secularism; 2) Gallican secularism; 3) separatist secularism in 1905; 4) contemporary separatist secularism; 5) open secularism; 6) identitarian secularism; 7) concordatarian secularism.

According to Barry A. Kosmin (2011), too, secularism is a multi-dimensional concept. Firstly, it has an individual and an institutional dimension. The former refers to 'personal identification with secular ideas and traditions as a mode of consciousness'; the latter to the institutional form of secular principles in the political and public sphere (Kosmin, 2011, p. 3). Secondly, secularism may be 'hard' or 'soft'. These two categories represent different ways to distinguish the secular from the religious as well as different modes of relationships between them. 'Hard' and 'soft' secularism have diverse epistemological bases. The former was the product of the Enlightenment and the separation between knowledge and religion advanced by positivist thinkers in the 19th and 20th centuries. It equates religion to superstition and considers it as politically dangerous inasmuch as it represents a form of false knowledge. The latter considers human knowledge fallible, and makes scepticism and tolerance the two approaches to science and religion. An example of soft secularism is American democracy, in which the constitution and law establish a separation between politics and religion, even though they prioritise the accommodation of religious differences even within governmental spheres. 'The mainstream consensus is that it is crucial to a free society to respect the religious convictions of its citizens; it is crucial to a pluralistic, differentiated, secular political order to carve out a sphere for freedom for religion and to let that sphere be autonomous, to the greatest extent possible, of

pressures emanating from Government' (Kosmin, 2011, p. 5). By contrast, an example of hard secularism is France. In this case, 'the state demands loyalty in terms of consciousness. Its goal is a standardised, homogeneous, relatively hard secularist society' (Kosmin, 2011, p. 9).

The sociologist of religion José Casanova (2009) also unpacks secularism. However, rather than discussing the institutional dimensions of secularism, he seeks to examine the 'secularist assumptions that permeate the taken-for-granted assumptions and thus the phenomenological experience of ordinary people' (Casanova, 2009, p. 1052). He distinguishes between two types of secularism: 1) secularism as a principle of statecraft; and 2) secularism as an ideology. The former refers to "some principle of separation between religious and political authority'. It does not encompass any substantive definition of religion and it is potentially compatible with an approach to religion as a moral source. This is its elemental difference from the second concept, secularism as ideology. According to Casanova: 'Secularism becomes an ideology the moment it entails a theory of what "religion" is or does. It is this assumption that "religion", in the abstract, is a thing that has an essence or that produces certain particular and predictable effects, which is the defining characteristic of modern secularism'. The ideology of secularism may be divided into two types. Into the first type, called 'philosophical-historical' secularism, fall all secularist theories of religion 'grounded in some progressive stadial philosophies of history that relegate religion to a superseded stage'. By contrast, the second type of theories is named 'political secularism' and presupposes that 'religion is either an irrational force or a non-rational form of discourse that should be banished from the democratic public sphere".

2.5 Empirical research on secularism

The 'crisis of secularism' mainly concerns its institutional forms. However, regarding the social level, several studies show that, in the Western world, secular identities are on the rise (e.g., Beard et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2018; Clements & Gries, 2016; Layman et al., 2021). This has led to a growing focus among scholars on secularism as a phenomenon to be studied at the micro level. In recent years, a group (not many) of quantitative studies have emerged analysing attitudes and perceptions of secularism at the individual level. Many of these studies have been produced in the United States, to test the impact of religious and secular identities on political polarization and political behaviour (e.g., Beard et al. 2013; Campbell & Layman, 2017; Campbell et al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2020; Castle & Schoettmer, 2019; Layman et al., 2021). In this strand of research, one of the first assumptions was the rejection of the equivalence between secularism and the absence of religiosity (e.g., Beard et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2018), asserting, on the contrary, that secularism results in an "affirmative

secular identity and commitment to secular principles" (Campbell et al., 2018, p. 552) which does not preclude being religious. Indeed, 'someone can embrace a secular perspective while maintaining a religious identity and participating in religious activities' (Campbell et al., 2018, p. 553). Moreover, these studies question the mainstream conception of secularism as 'one' thing, highlighting, by contrast, its multidimensional nature, even at the micro-level (e.g. Beard et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2018; Layman et al., 2021).

However, although most of these studies deal with the relationship between secular identities and politics, not all deal with political secularism. For instance, Campbell et al. (2018) distinguished between 'passive' and 'assertive' secularism, but, unlike Kuru (2009, see par. 2.4) they do not define these in terms of religion-state relations or religion's role in the public sphere. Rather, by the former they mean the absence of religion, understood as 'disbelief in God, lack of religious attendance, and the non-salience of religion', while by the latter they mean 'secular beliefs, secular identity, and commitment to secular perspective' (Campbell, 2018, p. 554; see also Campbell & Layman, 2017). They measure this second type of secularism with five statements about 'scientific evidence and human reason as the proper foundation for explaining natural phenomena, understanding human behaviour, and defining moral parameters' (p. 54). Campbell et al.'s (2018) interest was the impact of political identities on religious-secular identities. They found that 'active secularism' had a stronger effect on political orientation than religiosity, and that active secularists were largely Democrats, liberals, and left-wing. Furthermore, they discovered that 'active secularism' correlated highly with political engagement. Campbell and Layman (2017) had already used the same scale, revealing that both passive and active secularists were moving towards the left wing, and the latter were more politically active than the former.

An explicit reference to political secularism may be found in Beard et al. (2013), where the authors made a distinction between three types of secularism: 'religious', 'moral' and 'political'. The first concept concerned 'religious concepts such as the belief in God or an afterlife, or religious activity such as prayer'; the second 'beliefs about such ethical issues as homosexuality and abortion'; finally, political secularism concerned 'the proper role of religious beliefs in political life, and includes ideas such as the separation of church and state or the legislation of morality' (Beard et. al, 2013, p. 758). They proposed to measure the last of these with three items: 1) 'Do you worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality?'; 2) 'Do religious beliefs most influence your thinking about government and public affairs?'; and 3) 'Should churches and other houses of worship keep out of political matters?'. Nevertheless, following the results of an exploratory factor analysis, they decided to

lump together items from the 'moral' and 'political' categories to form the variable social secularism'. The study aimed to demonstrate that secularism was a multidimensional concept and to explore its impact on political affiliations and ideology. It confirmed secularism's different 'facets' and revealed the correlation between secularism, both 'religious' and 'social', with democratic political ideology and left-wing party affiliations.

In Europe as well, interest in political secularism is growing. Scholars are increasingly acknowledging its importance in shaping social processes and its impact on many political and moral issues (Arzheimer, 2023, p. 2; see for example, on gay and lesbian civil rights, Di Marco et al., 2020 on abortion or euthanasia, Magelssen et al., 2019).

Arzheimer (2022) developed a new scale to measure political secularism. He complained that 'single-item questions or short batteries that tap into politically secular views are rare in the extant literature' (p.829). His aim was to build a scale that could cover the spectrum of religion-politics relationships typifying political secularism. From other social surveys, he picked five items: 1) 'The EU treaties should contain a reference to the Christian god'; 2) 'Religious symbols such as crucifixes should be banned from state schools'; 3) 'Education in state schools should be free of religious elements'; 4) 'Scientific research on humans should not be limited by religious norms and values'; and 5) 'Religious norms and values have no place in public debates on political issues'. Arzheimer tested this scale in Germany, where he found it highly reliable. He also assessed its validity by exploring the scale's correlation with abortion views and religiousness. The results displayed a moderate to strong positive correlation with permissive views on abortion and a negative correlation with religiousness, making him conclude that the instrument was valid as clearly distinguishable from both.

One of the most interesting instruments is the 'secularism of the state scale' proposed by Hichy et al. (2012). They defined political secularism as 'the principle of separation between religion and government, that is the absence of religious involvement in government affairs and the absence of government involvement in religious affairs: secular States do not have state religion, laws based on sacred writings (such as Sharia), interference of religious leaders over political decisions, or discrimination on the basis of religion' (p.151). They measured the concept with a seven-item scale: 1) 'I believe the State should be secular'; 2) 'The State should not let the Church influence it'; 3) 'I think it is appropriate that the Church gives its opinion on the State laws'; 4) 'The Church should remain in its place and avoid getting involved in political affairs'; 5) 'The Church should do more to influence the decisions taken by the State'; 6) 'I think it is appropriate that the State considers the opinion of the Church'; and 7) 'The Church should not influence the State'. Analysing the predictors of political secularism, they found

that it was negatively correlated with Catholic identity and right-wing political orientation, and positively correlated with higher respect for the status of the State rather than of the Church. The scale was used even in further research which studied the impact of political secularism on attitudes towards bioethics (Di Marco et al., 2018) and gay rights (Hichy et al., 2015).

All the studies mentioned in this section are important as they highlight the need to investigate political secularism by looking at individual attitudes and perceptions and the necessity to work to build a more adequate scale of measurement. However, although they have the virtue of emphasising the multidimensional character of secularism, they have the limitation of downgrading political secularism to one of these dimensions, without taking into account that it itself is a multidimensional concept[7].

2.6 Theoretical framework and hypothesis

This and the previous chapter show, at the same time, the proximity of political secularism and religious freedom, and the lack of empirical inquiries about them (especially about political secularism) at the micro-sociological level. This thesis seeks to contribute to solving this gap, addressing the influence of attitudes towards different political secularist models on religious freedom perceptions. We agree with Kuru and Baubérot's claim that, far from being monolithic, different ideas of political secularism and religious freedom coexist in every country. Moreover, we concur with Breskaya et al. (2021b, 2022) on the need to empirically distinguish forms of secularism to better understand the impact of this complex variable in the production of different patterns of social perceptions of religious freedom (see par. 1.7).

In the following paragraphs, we illustrate our theoretical framework, highlighting our understanding of both political secularism and religious freedom in the context of this thesis and presenting our hypothesis about their relationships.

Moreover, we also introduce the concept of *religious establishment* which, as explained in the introduction of this work, although not central to this research, we chose to explore in comparative terms, to highlight the features of political secularism, as religious establishment represents a doctrine that is both 'related and opposite' to it (Bhargava, 2009, p.85).

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[7] Theoretically referring to Kosmin's hard and soft secularism, even Hichy et al. did not consider that the two categories could form two models with different correlates when constructing their scale.

The sociologist Slavica Jakelić (2022) criticises the critiques of secularism, making two points. First, she proposes to historicize the links among nationalisms, religions, and secularism. According to her, this allows us to see that modern nation-states are hardly secular, and that we must overcome essentialist understandings of political secularism and modernity that do not consider the agency of religious actors and institutions. By contrast, she suggests taking 'a global and comparative perspective" to show how 'the religious and the secular, in their various iterations and constellations, have shaped and continue to shape the multiplicity of modern projects in the contemporary world' (p. 363). Second, she suggests going beyond the idea of secularism as a merely political phenomenon, which reduces it to a question of power, and interpreting it also 'as a moral orientation toward the world, guided by a drive to enable human flourishing' (Jakelić, 2022, p.364). Looking at secularism as a moral disposition helps to grasp the different meanings that social and political actors confer to it and to see that religions are not always interpreted through the lens of conflict or power, but also as shared moral sources. One example is the social movements in the Soviet bloc, such as Solidarity in Poland, where 'secularism had more than one meaning even in the context of communist, atheist societies— one political, to legitimise the powers of the anti-religious Marxist state, and the other more ethical, which framed a powerful critique of those atheist states" (Jakelić, 2022, p. 364).

The distinction between political and ethical secularism is also at the core of Rajeev Bhargava's argument against secularism's critics. He argues (2009, 2011) that the problem is that none of them has yet proposed an alternative model to secularism capable of avoiding processes of religious homogenisation or dominance. Several scholars state that secularism's real goal is managing religious diversity (Maclure & Taylor, 2011; Modood, 2010); a diversity that is both between religions and within religions, and also between religious and non-religious. In this latter case, variety can be both horizontal and vertical. The first refers, for example, to doctrinal diversity among the various forms of Christianity. The second refers to inequalities within groups, an example of which may be the position of women or, as Barghava, the author of this distinction himself, writes, Dalits in the context of Hinduism. According to Barghava (2011), the defence of secularism starts from acknowledging that this diversity is entangled in power relations and carries with it always the possibility of interreligious and intrareligious domination, performed to defend group interests. From this perspective, secularism is the only viable model able to respond to this diversity and avoid the social domination of one part over the others. However, it is not sufficient to refer to the two mainstream Western models of

secularism: France and the U.S. For him, indeed, for their respective diversity-resistant and individualist characters, both systems have problems dealing with community-oriented religions, such as Roman Catholicism or Islam. Convinced that one should interpret secularism, more than as a political doctrine, as an ethical orientation—'whose concerns relating to religion are similar to theories that oppose unjust restrictions on freedom, morally indefensible inequalities, and intercommunal domination and exploitation' (Bhargava, 2011, p. 105)—Bhargava proposes to replace the Enlightenment model of secularism with one based on principled distance and contextuality. The first refers to the idea of a separation between State and religious institutions for the sake of equality. The aim is to guarantee that any religion might have a special position in society for some privileged relation with the state or the nation. However, principled distance recognizes that religion can be publicly significant and must be able to be taken into account. The second idea of 'contextual secularism' represents "a contextual moral reasoning" that makes possible the principled distance. It recognizes that 'the conflict between individual rights and group rights or between claims of equality and liberty or between claims of liberty and the satisfaction of basic needs cannot always be adjudicated by recourse to some general and abstract principle. Rather they can only be settled case by case and may require a fine balancing of competing claims. The eventual outcome may not be wholly satisfactory to either but still be reasonably satisfactory to both' (Bhargava, 2011, p. 108).

Considering the previous and these last insights, we hypothesise that when it is not interpreted as a hegemonic political project in conflict with religion but, as Jakelić and Bhargava suggest, as a moral orientation against inequalities and domination, secularism still has a vital role to play in the protection of religious freedom and also of human rights in general, especially in countries characterised by mono-confessional traditions and dominant religions that are public in character—as Italian and Croatian Catholicism are.

Drawing on Casanova (2009, 2011), we believe that it is worth distinguishing between at least two models of political secularism that we call: 1) *institutional secularism*, and 2) *ideological secularism*. We understand the first as a claim for some degree of separation between religion and State. It refers to the idea that state institutions must be separated from religious ones, 'the religious' from 'the political', without having a generally conflictual approach to religion. It is critical towards assigning excessive power to the dominant religion in influencing state policies and culture and in defining the nation, but it is supportive of religious pluralism and religious minorities' rights. The second is an ideological program which approaches religion in conflictual terms and advocates for its marginalisation from the political sphere and public life

in general. As we have seen, according to Casanova (2009), the first form of secularism has inclusive aims and includes religious freedom among its fundamental values. It is conceived 'either for the sake of the neutrality of the state vis-à-vis each and all religions, or for the sake of protecting the freedom of conscience of each individual, or for the sake of facilitating the equal access of all citizens, religious as well as non-religious, to democratic participation'. The second maintains that religion is a private matter which 'should be banished from the democratic public sphere' (Casanova, 2009, p. 67). As Madeley (2003) writes, these latter forms of secularism are often more common in societies where the state supports mono-confessionalism. They are often accompanied by atheistic positions and anti-clerical stances and view religion as a form of oppressive power against equality and freedom, based on false superstitions, which needs to be overcome by history. They represent a form of radical resistance 'towards religious conformity' (Madeley, 2003, p. 39)

Religious freedom

However, as illustrated in the previous chapter, we understand both political secularism and religious freedom as multidimensional concepts. According to Breskaya and Giordan (2019), according to SPRF's conceptual framework, we understand religious freedom as a socially constructed concept whose 'provinces of meaning' (Berger and Luckmann 1966, in Breskaya et al. 2022) change depending on individual characteristics and structural religious and socio-political features of the different contexts.

Various dimensions of religious freedom have been identified in the SPRF framework, yet, we believe that there are three dimensions of religious freedom most relevant for the study of its relationships with political secularism: religious freedom as a societal value, religious freedom as an individual value, and religious freedom as the freedom to express religion in public. We hold that each of them represents a potential 'point of friction' with the most important dimensions of political secularism and therefore deserves to be analysed. The first represents the association between religious freedom and majority-minority relations, non-discrimination against minorities, and legal equality, thus merging legal with social aspects. The second concerns the freedom of each person to search for their own spiritual truth, and to pursue their own spiritual fulfilment. It is more focused on the private experience of religiosity, deprived of any public interest. Finally, the third takes into account practices, referring to the right to teach, publish, establish religious groups, and express views in the media, thus highlighting the most controversial aspects of religious freedom and challenging the idea of religious freedom as an individual and private right.

Hypothesis on political secularism and religious freedom

Therefore, thus on the basis of our definitions of *institutional secularism* (separation, pluralism, plural public sphere) and *ideological secularism* (separation, privatisation of religion, neutral public sphere), we hypothesise that:

H$_1$ *Positive attitudes towards the institutional secularism model enhance support for religious freedom as a societal value, but positive attitudes towards the ideological model of secularism diminish it.*

H$_2$ *Positive attitudes towards both institutional secularism and the ideological secularism model enhance support for the individual value of religious freedom.*

H$_3$ *While positive attitudes towards the institutional secularism model enhance support for religious freedom as the freedom to express religion in public, positive attitudes towards the ideological model of secularism diminish it.*

Religious establishment

If there is little empirical (and sociological) research on political secularism, there is even less on the religious establishment. Bhargava (2009) defines the establishment as a 'doctrine favouring not separation but a union or alliance between church/religion and the state' (p. 85). This model, too, like political secularism, may have various dimensions and not always be in contrast with religious freedom (see Beaman et al., 2013). As we saw in par. 2.2, scholars concerned with democracy have shown that the establishment of a religion is not contrary to its development, as long as the freedom of religion is respected (Driessen, 2010; Stepan, 2011). The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir (2004-2010), held a similar position and claimed: 'State religion is a system that could be compatible with human rights' (Ghanea et al., 2023, p. 85). However, in another document, Heiner Bielefeldt (2010-2016), specified: 'While the mere existence of a state religion may not in itself be incompatible with human rights [...]it seems difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of an application of the concept of an official "State religion" that in practice does not have adverse effects on religious minorities, thus discriminating against their members' (Ghanea et al., 2023, p. 86).

Looking at research on religious liberty, one finds confirmation for this second hypothesis. Most of them, in fact, portray establishment as a threat to this right. Finke (2013) inserts privileged relationships between the State and the dominant religion or set of religions among the 'most common motives' which lead a State to restrict religious freedom. These alliances may be created 'in an effort to enhance political stability through increased political support, more effective control of the dominant religion, and increased political and ideological compliance'. However, religious freedom decreases when states form such alliances (Finke, 2013; see also Gill, 2008). In their empirical explorative research on the impact of different dimensions of governance on religious freedom, Finke and Martin (2014) found that government favouritism for a select group of religions was a strong predictor of restrictions on religious freedom. In his work on religious freedom in non-democratic states, Sarkissian (2015) also proved that the establishment or favouritism for one religion alone is at the expense of the religious freedom of other religions and minorities.

Hypothesis for establishment

Therefore, according to this strand of study, we hypothesise that:

H4 *Positive attitudes towards the religious establishment model have a negative impact on support for religious freedom, in all its three dimensions.*

Political affiliations, political orientations, political secularism, and establishment

One of the objectives of the research was to explore the differences between religious and political groups with respect to their attitudes towards political secularism. On the basis of what was reported in section 2.5 and thus of empirical research on these issues, we can make some hypotheses.

As we have seen, most studies distinguish secularism (political and non-political) from religious identity (e.g., Campbell & Layman, 2015; Campbell et. al, 2018). Even Jonathan Fox (2018) argues that 'one does not have to be personally secular to be politically secular. Many religious people feel that religion is best left out of politics and, while personally religious, believe in some form of political secularism' (Fox, 2018, p. 180). Therefore, concerning the more moderate form of political secularism—the institutional one—we hypothesise that:

H5 *There are no differences between religious groups in supporting the institutional secularism model.*

Nevertheless, the case of *ideological secularism* is different. As we have seen, it entails a normative negative conception of religion (Casanova, 2009) and is often associated with strong anti-clericalism (Madeley, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to think that religious people might support it. We thus hypothesise that:

H6 *Non-religious support the ideological secularism model more than religious majorities and minorities.*

Concerning *establishment*, we rely on rational theory's assumptions, according to which the majority of religious institutions tend to seek hegemony for ideological, but also economic and political motivations (see, e.g., Gill, 2008) and, accordingly, we hypothesise that:

H7 *Majoritarian religious groups support the religious establishment model more than non-religious and religious minorities.*

Regarding political orientation, as we have seen, all of the empirical studies on political secularism demonstrate a strong correlation between secularism (political and non-) and political affiliation and ideologies, with left-wing individuals more inclined to support secularism in all its forms, and right-wing less. Therefore, according to these insights, we assumed that:

H8 *Left-wing and centre people support institutional and ideological secularism models more than right-wing people.*

H9 *Right-wing support the establishment model more than left-wing and centre-oriented people.*

Conclusions

Dealing with political secularism is not an easy task. Central to reflections on religion, politics, democracy, and modernity, in this field it is one of the most debated concepts of recent decades. In the chapter, albeit briefly, we have retraced the huge debate that has addressed and is still addressing this concept. First, we illustrated the differences between political secularism and the other two interrelated concepts of secularity and secularisation. Second, we sought to highlight its primary and contrasting meanings and see how this normative separation between religion and State materialises in the European empirical landscape. Then, we looked at how it has been conceptualised in political and sociological sciences, where political secularism is understood more as an 'ideology' and conceived as a multidimensional concept. We also illustrate the most important empirical research on secularism that has emerged in the last few years, especially in the United States but also in Europe.

Based on this research, we have proposed our theoretical framework. Following Jakelić (2022) and Barghava (2011), we have argued that a conceptualization of secularism only as a political project opposed to religion is insufficient to account for its role in European societies in the protection of religious freedom. We have thus supported the idea of its multiple nature, in which the political datum is combined with an ethical orientation. Thus, we proposed conceptualising it by adopting Casanova's (2009) theory and using two dimensions: 1) *institutional secularism* and 2) *ideological secularism*. We also proposed to look at religious freedom as a multidimensional concept and distinguish among at least three of its components: religious freedom as a societal value, religious freedom as an individual value, and religious freedom as the freedom to express religion. In comparative terms, we also add to our analysis the *religious establishment* model. Finally, based on the previous research we have made a series of hypotheses about the impact of these different models on religious freedom and their complex interplay with political and religious identities.

Chapter 3
Italy and Croatia: institutional and socio-religious features

Introduction

In quantitative research, the focus on statistical analysis sometimes means that data risk being 'divorced from the context in which they were constructed, thus losing the meanings they had for the people involved' (Farran, 1990). In contrast, in this research project the link between data and the societies in which they are embedded is considered to be of primary importance. In previous chapters, we looked at how religious freedom and political secularism have been conceptualised in political and sociological studies. This chapter has a more empirical purpose. We want to see how these concepts and their relations play out in Italy and Croatia, two countries that are part of the European Union and have a Catholic majority, but that are marked by very different political-religious histories.

While these two national contexts share similar institutional features, both being concordatarian states, this concordatarian model has been historically constituted in different ways in each country. Italy and Croatia also differ in the socio-religious processes that affect them, in terms of pluralism, the position of religious minorities and the links between dominant religion and national identity. While in Croatia the legacies of the communist regime and the war of the 1990s produced divisions among different religious groups, Italy has a longer history of interreligious cooperation, at least at the level of society.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first concerns the Italian context, the second the Croatian one. For both countries, we will analyse the socio-religious composition and ongoing changes, the history of state-religion relations, and the legislative system regulating religious freedom and state-religion separation. In particular, emphasis will be placed on the aporias of achieving full implementation of religious freedom and secularism in two countries with a historical majority Church that is deeply connected to the processes of historical construction of the nation.

Two sections will be devoted to the positions of Italian and Croatian citizens on issues such as religion and state separation and the intervention of the Catholic Church in societal and political affairs.

Finally, conclusions will be outlined, in which an update of the assumptions made in the second chapter will also be reported based on the contextual characteristics of Italy and Croatia.

3.1 Italy

3.1.1 Socio-religious profile

According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), today the Italian resident population amounts to 58,983,122 people (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2022). The number of resident foreigners is 5,193,669, about 8.7% of the entire population. Over the past two decades, the foreign population has grown exponentially, from 1,341,414 in 2002, to 4,787,166 in 2014. Since 2014, the growth has stopped, settling at the current numbers.

It is important to highlight these data because immigration, together with a low birth rate, are the main features of the change in Italy's demography in the last twenty years (Magazzini, 2020), with relevant repercussions on the composition of the religious field.

The majority of Italians declare themselves Catholic. It is not easy to establish their exact number since the national census does not include a question about religious affiliation, and research on this subject often uses different methodologies and gives contradictory results (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2010).

According to one of the most reliable research projects published in recent years (Garelli, 2020), today Italian Catholics would amount to about 76% of the population, whereas ten years ago this religion included at least 88% of the population (see Tab.3.1).

Tab. 3.1

Religious affiliations in Italy between 1994 and 2017 (%)

	1994	2007	2017
Catholics	88.6	88.1	76.0
Other religions	2.6	4.8	8.0
No religion	8.8	9.1	16.0
Total	4.500	3.160	3.238

Notes. The data are from *Gente di poca fede*, by F. Garelli, 2020, Il Mulino.

Despite the significant decline, these figures show that Catholicism is still holding steady, especially when compared to other European states, both in the North - i.e. Belgium or France - and in the South - i.e. Spain (Perez-Agote, 2012). However, looking more closely at this seemingly homogenous religious landscape, one may observe, on the one hand, the high contemporary fragmentation of the Catholic field (see also Pace 2007), and on the other, the dramatic rise of religious pluralism, to be understood as both the numerical growth of immigrants' new religions and also of non-religious people.

Regarding the first change, it is once again Garelli (2020) that gives an account of the main trends existing in today's Catholic Italy. He identifies four ways of being Catholic among Italians. These modes are different with respect to the two attributes of belief and belonging, and have undergone significant changes over the last three decades, especially in terms of numbers.

The first group is that of *convinced and active Catholics*, that is, the most religiously committed Catholics, who attend religious rites, nurture a Christian vision of life and use their faith to respond to the challenges of modernity. They are about 22.5% of those who declare themselves Catholics.

The second group is that of *convinced but not always active Catholics*, which can be identified with 29.8% of the reference population, and brings together those who recognize their religious affiliation but interpret it in a discontinuous and personal way.

The third group is that of *Catholics by tradition and culture*, which refers to those who embrace Catholicism more for ethnocultural reasons than for reasons of faith.

Finally, the last small group is that of the *selective* or *critical* (3.8%), i.e., Catholics who are very critical of the Church and who cultivate their spirituality in reserved groups or alternative ways to those offered by the Church structure.

Among these groups, the numerical strength of each of these groups has undergone major changes in recent decades, leading to the ethnic and cultural mode of Catholicism prevailing over all others.

Indeed, the number of *convinced and active Catholics* has remained relatively stable over time, demonstrating that in Italy there still exists a 'Catholic subculture that is sufficiently consolidated and capable of reproducing itself even in the current era' (Garelli, 2020, p.53); while the number of *convinced but not always active Catholics* has dramatically declined, from 41% 30 years ago, when they represented the largest group, to a meagre 30% today. By contrast, it is the group of *Catholics by tradition and culture* that has grown the most in recent decades, from 27.7% in 1994 to 43.6% in 2017 (see Fig.3.1).

Fig. 3.1

Catholic belongings in Italy from 1994 to 2017
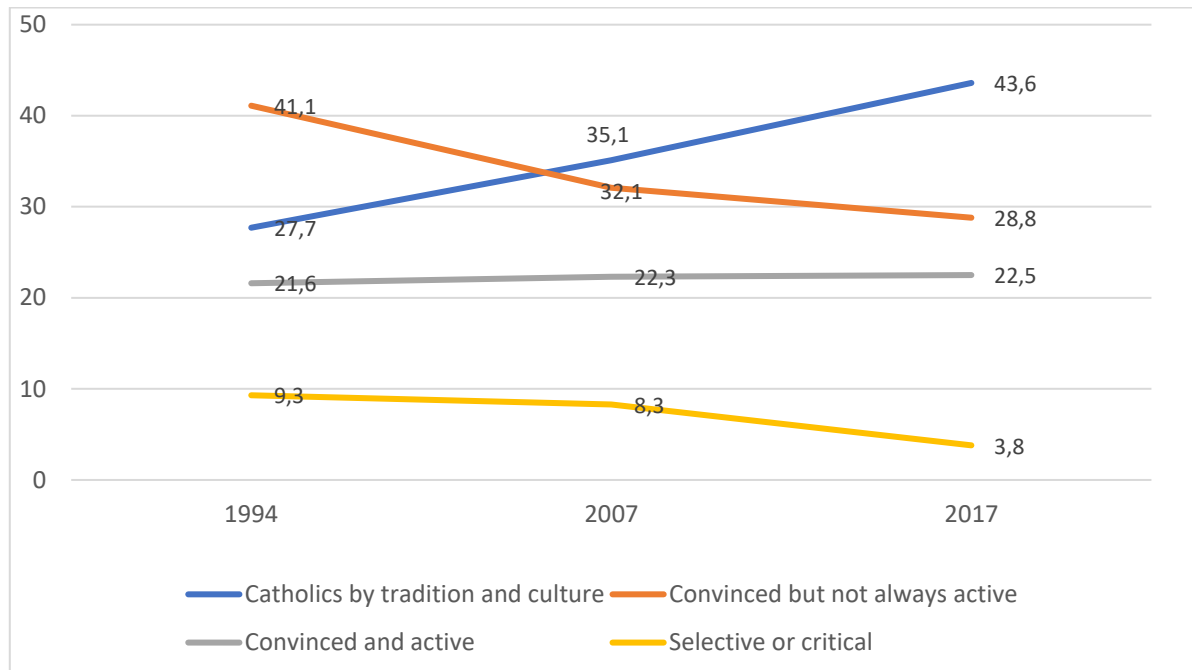
Notes. Data adapted from *Gente di poca fede*, by F.Garelli, 2020, il Mulino.

The growth of 'cultural Catholicism' (Demerath, 2000) is not surprising, as it is affecting several parts of Europe with a Catholic majority and is driven both by political factors, such as the increasingly instrumental use of faith by politics, and by social factors, such as the need to find ethical references and a national glue in a fast-changing world (Garelli 2020).

The second phenomenon that is changing the Italian religious landscape is the emergence of a new pluralism, due mainly to globalization processes and the migration flows of the last twenty years (Ambrosini et al., 2018; Pace, 2014). Even in this case, establishing statistically the dimension of this religious pluralism is a highly difficult methodological task. According to the Dossier Statistico Immigrazione (Idos-Confronti, 2022), one of the most reliable sources on the subject, in 2020, out of a population of 5.013.200 foreign residents, more than half (2.591.000, 51.7%) were Christians and a third were Muslims (1.667.400, 33.3%). Together these two groups represent the religious affiliations of 85% of the immigrant population in the country (see Tab. 3.2).

Tab. 3.2

Religious minorities in Italy (2021)

Religion	Members	%
Muslims	1.667.400	33.3
Orthodox	1.441.500	28.8
Catholics	885.100	17.7
Atheists/Agnostics	242.400	4.8
Protestants	224.400	4,5
Other Christians denom.	40.000	0,8
Hinduists	154.800	3,1
Buddhists	118.000	2.4
Others	85.000	1.7
Other Oriental religions	83.300	1.7
Traditional religions	66.500	1.3
Jews	4.800	0.1

Notes. Data are from *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione*, by Idos/Confronti, 2022, Centro studi e ricerche IDOS.

However, the new Italian pluralism is characterised not only by the numerical growth of new faiths but also by an unexpected dynamism of some of these new religious communities. With their strong ties to cultural identity and capacity to mobilise people, especially second generation immigrants, these communities are claiming new religious and citizenship rights and changing the public image of an inherently Catholic Italy (e.g. Mezzetti & Ricucci, 2019). Indeed, the entry and settlement of immigrants from different countries is contributing to a revitalization of religious experience and is promoting institutional and theological transformations (Ambrosini et al., 2018) that have repercussions for the relations between religion and politics, for individual religious experiences, and also for the Catholic Church (Pace, 2013). If, in the past, the latter had established interreligious dialogues with other religious traditions historically present on Italian territory, such as Jewish or Protestant communities, it had always done so as primus inter pares. Today, by contrast, it is forced to become aware of the shifts underway which oblige it to remodel its schemes to resist a changing world (Pace, 2013), although new religious communities have not yet definitively undermined

the Catholic Church's political and social primacy (given that, as we have seen, it is still the leading religion in terms of membership).

The third religious trend registered in contemporary Italy is the dramatic increase of non-religious people. In the last twenty to twenty-five years, the number of people identifying with 'no religion' in Italy has almost doubled, rising from 8.8% in the 90s to 16% today (Doxa, 2021; Garelli, 2020). The growth of non-believers is a fact that affects many of the world's developed countries (Cragun, 2016; Lindeman et al. 2020; Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2020; Woodhead, 2017), but in Italy, it takes on specific characteristics. First of all, despite the fact that sociologically those who declare themselves without religion are not necessarily closed to any form of transcendence, in the case of Italy non-religious are 'mostly people who are refractory not only to a link with a church or a religious confession but also to any perspective of faith' (Garelli, 2020, p. 51).

Secondly, there is a kind of politicisation of non-religious identities, whose proponents also combine private beliefs with political stances that question the predominant role of the Church and accuse it of delaying Italian cultural modernization, especially on ethical and moral issues. Over the last years, the confrontation between the religious and the non-religious has been becoming stronger—especially on issues such as family, bioethics, women's and LGBT rights, and the secularity of the state—echoing the 'culture wars' described by James D. Hunter (1991) in the United States (Ozzano & Giorgi, 2016).

For this thesis, this comparison is particularly interesting. Today, in fact, both at a political and social level, the challenge to the current model of religion and State relations seems to come more from the secular world than from the minoritarian religious one, to the extent that one scholar hypothesised that the concordatarian system—which is the Italian Church-State model —will enter into crisis if in the coming years there is a strong expansion of the secular world and of those who declare themselves 'no religion'(Martino, 2014).

3.1.2 Church and state in Italy: historical background

It is exactly this dynamic between religious and lay powers that led Alessandro Ferrari (2008b) to write that, in Italy, it is better to speak about 'laicization' rather than 'secularisation', as the change in the religious scenario is a consequence more of 'the confrontation between public powers and the monopolist Church' than the advance of modernity (Ferrari, 2008b, p.133).
Italian institutions have always had close relationships with the Catholic Church, which has played an important role both in terms of its influence on the formation of Italian national identity (Pace, 1998) and its ability to intervene in the political sphere (Donovan, 2003).

However, this relation has been subject to different phases that saw the alternation of more clerical and more secular politics, driven by endogenous opportunities and exogenous factors, carried also by global history.

The Statuto Albertino of 1848—the constitutional statute granted by Charles Albert I to the Kingdom of Savoy and then, from 1861, adopted throughout Italy—declared in its first article that 'the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion is the sole religion of the State. The other religions now existing are tolerated in accordance with the law'.

However, from the period of the reunification of Italy (1860-70) until the beginning of the so-called 'ventennio fascista' (1922-1943), relations between the Italian state and the Church were characterised by a marked hostility. Indeed, the liberal governments that followed reunification adopted a series of policies aimed at diminishing both the economic privileges of the Church (between 1866-67 some Church entities were abolished and some of their property were confiscated) and its cultural and political power over the secular sphere (e.g., introduction of compulsory civil marriage, 1865; restriction of Catholic religious education in state schools, 1877; reform of the criminal law provisions that protected religion, 1889; state control of the welfare and charitable institutions, 1890). These were the years that inaugurated the so-called 'Roman Question', which was only to be definitively resolved with the advent of Italian Fascism (for the 'Roman Question' see Chabod, 1951; Donovan 2003).

After the end of World War I, in fact, the Fascist Party led by Mussolini, who had taken power in 1922, began a strategy of reconciliation with the Catholic Church that culminated in the drafting of the Lateran Pacts of 1929. The pacts consisted of two separate documents: the Treaty and the Concordat. In the former, it was stated that 'the Catholic, apostolic and Roman religion is the sole religion of the State' (art. 1), the independence and sovereignty of the Holy See over the Vatican State were recognised, and the Vatican was financially compensated for the losses caused by the laws of 1866-67. In the latter, among other things, the teaching of the Catholic religion was recognised as the basis of public education, extending it up to secondary school, religious marriage was established as sufficient, tax privileges were granted to ecclesiastical bodies, and a further series of exemptions and privileges were accorded to ecclesiastics.

On 2nd June 1946, Italy was declared a Republic and on 1st January its Constitution came into force. It reconfirmed the Lateran Pacts through article 7, which reads: 'The State and the Catholic Church are independent and sovereign, each within its own sphere. The Lateran pacts regulate their relations. Amendments to such Pacts which both parties accept shall not require the procedure of constitutional amendments'.

As Garelli (2011) points out, from the end of the 1970s 'a phenomenon clearly emerges […] the diffusion, also in Italy, of the processes of secularization, and with them those changes in mentality and customs that had already been seen in more advanced nations' (Garelli, 2011, p.217). These changes resulted from exogenous and endogenous factors to the Church. On the one hand, there was the 'economic miracle', the American cultural influence, and the students' and workers' protests; on the other hand, there was the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which led the Church at the same time to adapt to contemporary society and to divide itself internally (Pollard, 2008, p. 130).

The two referenda on divorce and on abortion, respectively held in 1974 and in 1981, expressed all these contradictions presented in Italian society, and showed a crucial shift from a society pervaded by Catholic teaching to another in which the Church was sidelined in both the cultural and political choices of individuals and groups. In 1983, the Catholic periodical *Civiltà Cattolica* wrote in an editorial: 'Italy can no longer define itself as a Catholic nation' (Garelli, 2011).

From a legal point of view, one of the consequences of these changes was a revision of the Lateran Pacts. In 1984, Italy and the Vatican signed a new Concordat (Accordi di Villa Madama) according to which the separation between Church and State was officially stated, and Italy ceased to be a Catholic state, although the Catholic Church was guaranteed a predominant role in Italian cultural and religious life. From an economic point of view, ecclesiastical entities and properties were regulated and, at the same time, the Otto per Mille was introduced, which allowed voluntary contributions to be paid through taxes. From the point of view of religious education, the possibility of establishing Catholic schools equivalent to secular ones was granted, and the teaching of the Catholic religion was confirmed in every school and grade other than the university, even though that teaching became optional. Finally, from a cultural point of view, Catholic religious festivities were established as official holidays of the country, and the state engaged in protecting the artistic and cultural heritage of the Church.

At the same time, from 1984 onwards, the growing pluralism of Italian society began to be formally recognized through the Italian system of Intese—i.e. agreements between the State and religious confessions other than the Catholic one. In 1984, the parliament approved an agreement with the Tavola Valdese; in 1987 an agreement was signed with the Jewish community; in 1991 an Orthodox patriarchate was established in Venice; and in 1994 it was the turn of the Baptists. In 2007, the Italian government signed an agreement with Jehovah's Witnesses, the Italian Union of Buddhists, the Italian Hindu Union, the Apostolic Church in

Italy, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Exarchate of Southern Europe.

Moreover, in 2005, the government created an advisory body, whose aim was to bring the state to an agreement with the Islamic community on Italian territory, but the attempt failed and, for the moment, an understanding has not been reached.

3.1.3 Juridical and narrative laicità

The Lateran Pacts and the legal privileges accorded to the Catholic Church in Italy cause it to fall among the so-defined concordatarian states (see ch.2, par.2.3). These are states 'characterized by a simple separation of state and church coupled with the recognition of a multitude of common tasks which link state and church activity, which are often recognized in the form of agreements, treaties, and Concordats' (Sandberg 2008, p.3).

Concordatarian states are widespread in Europe and mainly in predominantly Catholic countries. This is for two reasons: 1) Catholicism presents itself as a highly hierarchical religion, an element that makes it an ideal interlocutor for the nation-state, and 2) at the time the concordats were signed the religion present on the territory was Catholic (Martino, 2014). However, they pose some challenges to the effective implementations of secularism at the legal, political, and social levels.

Alessandro Ferrari (2008b) distinguishes between 'narrative' and 'juridical' secularism. The former has to do with 'politics, morality, ideology'; the latter, on the other hand, is 'the distillation of the former, consecrated … by the different institutions that formed the state legal systems'. The two secularisms are closely interrelated, with narrative secularism seeking to turn into legal secularism and legal secularism needing the legitimacy of narrative secularism in order not to dissolve in its practical application. However, very often, their relationship takes the form of conflict.

In Italy the juridical concept of *laicità*, although not present in the Constitution, is addressed in the Constitutional Court's sentence n.203 of 1989, drafted in response to the question of the constitutionality of Article 9.2 of Law 121 of 1985 on the teaching of the Catholic religion in public schools. In the judgement—with reference to Articles 2, 3, 7, 8, 19, and 20 of the Italian Constitution—the Court defines *laicità* as a supreme principle of the State and argues that it does not imply 'indifference on the part of the State to religions', but rather 'a guarantee by the State to safeguard freedom of religion, in a regime of confessional and cultural pluralism'.

The judgement outlines, therefore, an understanding of secularism not as 'an instrument to fight the religious presence in the public square and to foster the secularisation of the Italian State

and civil society' but as a tool to recognize 'the existence of a plurality of value systems [and] the same dignity of all personal choices in the field of religion and conscience'. In this sense, 'this principle does not refer to State-Church relations only, but it is a synthesis of the values and duties of the contemporary plural and democratic State in which religion plays a full role, like each other component of civil society' (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2010, p. 3).

Nevertheless, this juridical clarity does not always find a place in the reality of its application. In today's Italy, Catholicism continues to enjoy relevant legal, political, and social privileges (Garelli, 2006) reflecting its historical primacy and its role in the maintenance of social cohesion, in a country with a weak national character (Cavalli, 2001, p. 128). The presence of the Church is pervasive, due to the high number of parishes on Italian territory and the structural solidity of its network of institutions and organisations operating in different sectors of society, from the social sector to the health, cultural and educational fields (Garelli, 2007). Moreover, notwithstanding the loss of parliamentary political representation that followed the end of the Christian Democracy (CD) party in the 1990s (Donovan, 2003), the Church still plays an important political role at the grassroots level and maintains an influence on fundamental matters such as immigration, sexual and reproductive rights, or bioethics issues (Ozzano & Giorgi, 2016; Ozzano & Maritato, 2019).

Scholars have used different terms to describe this hybrid form of Italian secularism. Salih (2009) speaks of 'fragments' of secularism, while Alessandro Ferrari, after describing it as a 'baptised secularism' (Ferrari, 2008b), prefers to use the expression 'practising secularism' (Ferrari, 2008b), i.e., 'a secularism based on the implicit norm that continues to recognise to the Catholicism—and not to constitutional principles—a pontifical role in the process of societal integration and, consequently, a regime of privilege in perfect continuity with Italy's nature as a nation-state and not as a state-nation' (p.1124).

This Italian 'narrative secularity' is the product of the Italian historical developments of Church-State relations and is mirrored in a number of areas regulated by the Concordat, such as religious freedom, education, funding, and traditional terrains of confrontation between religious and secular actors, such as sexuality and bioethics.

3.1.4 Religious freedom in Italy: legal aspects and problematic spots

Although silent on the question of *laicità*, the Italian Constitution openly addresses the right to religious freedom.

In the Constitution, there are five articles that recognize religious freedom as one of the constitutive rights of the Italian legal and value system. Beyond article 8, which states 'All religious confessions are equally free before the law', articles 2, 3, 19, and 20 also deal with the concept, and read:

> Art. 2: The Republic recognises and guarantees the inviolable rights of the person, as an individual and in the social groups where human personality is expressed [...]
>
> Art. 3: All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.
>
> Art. 19: All persons have the right to profess freely their own religious faith in any form, individually or in association, to disseminate it and to worship in private or public, provided that the religious rites are not contrary to public morality.
>
> Art. 20: The ecclesiastical nature and the religious or ritual purposes of an association or institution may not constitute a cause for special limitations under the law, nor for special taxation with respect to its establishment, legal status or any of its activities.

Ferrari and Ferrari (2010, p. 6) distinguish between individual and institutional aspects of constitutional provisions on religion, and assert that the latter takes precedence over the former. Indeed, while articles 7[8] and 8, which deal with relations between the State and the Church/Churches, are placed in the 'fundamental principles' section and thus by their very nature unchangeable, articles 19 and 20, which refer to religion in terms of freedom of conscience and association, are in the section concerning 'civil rights'.

Nevertheless, the distinction between the two pairs of articles also has relevant implications in assessing how the Italian State conceives of the relationship among pluralism, religious freedom, and *laicità* (Ferrari 2008a). In his sociology of religious freedom, Richardson (2006, p. 278) found pluralism to be one of the structural conditions for implementing and maintaining the right to religious freedom. However, he highlighted that the presence of religious diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition, as historical and political forces may always interfere with the 'natural' impact of structural pluralism (Richardson, 2006, p.278)

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[8] The article referring to the Concordat.

In the last few decades, migration and globalisation have led to an exponential growth of religious pluralism in Italy. If Articles 19 and 20 seem more compatible with the creation of an effectively multicultural society, open to recognizing diversity according to a liberal and universal orientation, the application of Articles 7 and 8 implies a series of conditions that in fact prevent the enjoyment of equal religious freedoms for all the denominations today present on Italian territory (Ferrari, 2008a, pp. 137-138).

Apart from establishing the separation between the state and the Catholic Church (7.1) or other religious denominations (8.2), art. 7's second section and art. 8's third section ratify the 'bilaterality principle', meaning that the State must regulate its relations with religious communities through agreements and can deal only with those denominations that have reached a Concordat or an *Intesa* with it. Such an agreement is signed by the President of the Council of Ministers and the representative of religious organisations and must be ratified or approved by the Parliament. The bilaterality of this provision refers to the fact that the State alone cannot change the agreement without the approval of the religious community in question. This makes the law 'atypical' because once it enters into force it can be modified only by another agreement: a legislative strategy that allows the Catholic Church and some other religious denominations (those that have signed an *Intesa*) to have the guarantee that their legal status, benefits and privileges cannot be altered without considering their will (Alicino, 2017, p.12).

As Annichino and Giorgi (2017) write: 'legal recognition is a goal for the majority of the religions present in Italy' (p.288). Reaching it is important not only to obtain political and economic benefits but also a sort of status of 'social respectability' (Annicchino & Giorgi, 2017). However, the process is complex and marked by a number of biases that reflect the predominance of Catholicism and the Western model of religion, and that gives rise to a 'vraie lutte pour la représentation' (Ferrari, 2008a, p.136).

First of all, in order to reach an agreement with the state, the 'religious' nature of the confessions must be recognized. This recognition is largely discretional and more based on cultural background than on clear legal criteria[9] (Annichino & Giorgi, 2017). Second, in order

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[9] One of the documents used to determine if a denomination can be defined as 'religious' is the text drafted by the Constitutional Court in 1993: 'The court ruled that the identity of "religious denomination" (*confessione religiosa*) could be deduced first, from the fact of having entered an intesa with the state or, second, from a previous recognition of the relevant community as a religious denomination by any local or central civil authority (*riconoscimento pubblico*); third, the nature of religious denomination could emerge from the examination of the community's statutes; and fourth, it could emerge from the assessment of the "common knowledge" (*comune considerazione*) of public

to be recognized as 'authentic', religions must be organised according to the dualistic (Church) model of the Western religion: both the members and the activities must be divided according to the distinction between religious and secular (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2010). Finally, it is prescribed that the process of negotiating the agreement takes place between a representative of the state and a national representative of the religion requesting the agreement. These two last conditions are particularly tricky for some denominations, like Islam, characterised by a horizontal structure, with no clear separation between spiritual guides and 'normal' believers (Alicino, 2015).

Therefore, the treatment by the State of religious minorities and diversity, makes Italy not only a *concordatarian* state but also a *pyramidal* (Annicchino & Giorgi, 2017; Martino) or a four-tier system (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2010). In this system, the legal position of the different religious communities reflects their social status (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2010). At the top, there is the Catholic Church, whose relations with the state and its privileged position are regulated by the Villa Madama agreements and other ordinary laws. At the second level, there are the religious confessions that have established an agreement with the state, according to the parameters set out in Article 8, which benefit from a series of economic and political privileges. At the third level, there are the so-called 'admitted cults', namely those denominations that have started the bureaucratic process to obtain an agreement and that, in the meantime, are regulated by Law 1159 of 1929, which guarantees certain rights while allowing the State to exercise extensive control over the denominations that make use of them. Finally, at the lowest level of the pyramid, there are those denominations—sometimes very numerous, such as Islam—which, because of their recent establishment or their beliefs and practices considered to be in conflict with public order, do not enjoy any of the rights recognized to other religious groups, but only the benefits granted to private groups in a generic sense.

The pyramid model is very common in Western European states but also—as we shall see—in post-communist countries, and mainly serves to manage growing pluralism by maintaining 'considerable social control … over selected segments of that pluralism', thus preserving social and cultural dominance of traditional religions (Richardson, 2006, p. 278).

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opinion' (Ventura 2013, p. 74, in Annicchino & Giorgi, 2017). In this definition a first obstacle is clear, as the 'common knowledge' of public opinion is often linked to the religious identity of the nation. In many European countries, this may become even more problematic, given the trend, identified by Lori Beaman (2016), whereby national and international courts have transformed the majority of religious traditions into the culture and heritage of the nation, making its challenge even more unreasonable (Beaman 2016, p.31, in Annicchino & Giorgi 2017).

3.1.5 Other issues about laicità

In addition to the question of State-religion agreements, there are other points on which the debate is polarising in Italy, especially between Catholics and non-believers. These are points that, again, challenge the model of *laicità* affirmed by the Constitutional Court and that are becoming increasingly urgent as religious and cultural pluralism grows. They are: 1) the funding of the Catholic Church, 2) religious education, 3) religious symbols, and 4) issues related to bioethics and sexuality.

Funding

With regard to **funding**, a particularly controversial case is that of the eight per thousand (Otto per Mille). Until 1986, the state paid a monthly salary to church personnel. This practice was replaced by Article 47 of Law No. 222 of May 1985, which stipulated that each taxpayer would be obliged to allocate 0.08% of the IRPEF quota to either the State, the Catholic Church, or one of all the religious denominations that has an agreement with the State, as the taxpayer chooses.

Many activists and scholars have denounced the opacity and lack of transparency of the mechanism. Firstly, they have shown that its subordination to having an agreement with the state unbalances the system in the direction of favouring confessional freedom, at the expense of broader religious freedom, of which the former is only one expression (Domianello & Pasquali, 2020).

Secondly, they have emphasised the controversial and opaque nature of fund distribution mechanisms (Ercolessi 2009). Taxpayers are not obliged to choose which religious organisation receives their eight per thousand, however, the eight per thousand of the tax revenue of those who did not make the choice is distributed proportionally according to the percentage of preferences received by each competitor. In Italy, today only 40% of taxpayers declare to whom they want to devolve their eight per thousand, and 80% of those decide to allocate it to the Catholic Church. The result is that 80% of the entire 0.08% of IRPEF revenue goes to the Catholic Church (Ercolessi 2009, p.15). In addition to the ignorance of many taxpayers with respect to how the rule works, there is also the disproportion between the advertising made by the Catholic Church and the State, so that those taxpayers who do understand how the eight per thousand works are disproportionately Catholic.

Over the years, there have been a series of campaigns for the abolition, or at least the reshaping, of this rule. The Court of Auditors has also spoken out against several aspects of this rule,

arguing that 'the sums counted on the basis of non-expressed choices should be considered public money to all intents and purposes' and that the sums received by the Catholic Church could open 'the chapter of unreasonable public financing, which could reach the threshold of unconstitutionality, if referred to the value of secularism as a supreme principle of the order'. However, to date, the mechanism remains untouched.

Religious Education

Another aspect that has increasingly become an issue of political divisions is **religious education.** The Concordat between the Italian State and the Catholic Church stipulates that in all Italian schools of the various grades there must be optional weekly Catholic religion lessons (one and a half hours for nursery school, two for primary school, and one for middle school and high school). Until 2003, teachers were chosen directly by the curia; today they are appointed by the State and integrated into the school staff, although the Church has the right to object if they do not meet certain standards of morality.

Article 9 of the revised Concordat of 1984 regulates this field. As Marco Ventura (2013; in Annicchino & Giorgi, 2016, p.288) highlights, according to this article, there are three elements that must characterise this teaching: 1) its cultural connotation, meaning that it is not a form of catechism or proselytism; 2) its non-compulsory nature; 3) the mandatory balance between Catholicism and the freedom of religion and belief.

According to the Ministry of Education data published by the Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti (UAAR), in the year 2020/2021, out of 7,214,045 students in state schools, 1,014,841 did not make use of the religious instruction hour. There is a significant gap between the regions of the North and those of the South: Tuscany is the region with the highest percentage of non-attending students[10] (25.23%); Basilicata, on the other hand, has the lowest percentage (2.57%). The choice not to attend increases with age (preschools 10.59%, primary schools 10.20%, middle and high schools 19.76%).

Several ethical, practical, and political problems concern this rule. First, from the perspective of the implementation of legal secularism, it is problematic that the State pays for religious instruction, creating *de facto* unequal treatment within a public institution. Even more so since

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[10] Obviously, the emphasis on non-availing students instead of availing students reflects the purpose of the UAAR, which is an organisation that represents the views of atheists and agnostics and defends the secularity of the state.

other denominations, despite being legitimised to hold teaching hours if requested by families or pupils, must pay for these activities from their own funds.

Secondly, practical problems arise having to do with the protection of privacy about one's religious affiliation (privacy also respected by the national census), or with the fact that alternative activities are sometimes missing or poorly organised.

Finally, one of the most critical points is the ethical (and political) dilemma of how to reconcile this religious hour with the growth of pluralism in Italian society. Research shows that second-generation immigrants do not recognize themselves in this system (Frisina, 2011), which they experience as discriminatory and distant from the super-diversity of contemporary Italy (Giorda, 2015).

Religious Symbols

Concerning **religious symbols**, most of the debate refers to the display of the crucifix in public institutions, especially in public schools. In Italy, indeed, according to its inclusive understanding of *laicità*, there are no restrictions to the wearing of religious symbols in institutional spaces as in other European countries (see France and Switzerland), although some local cases raised the issue ("Bologna, praticante avvocata deve lasciare l'aula", 2018).

From a legal perspective, the display of crucifixes in classrooms is subject to unclear regulation, which has given rise to political and social debates. Some argue that it is contrary to the principle of *laicità* and the values of pluralism that it underlies; others that it represents a sign of national identity, and that it can also act as a value guide for immigrants arriving in the country (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2010). According to Giorda (2015), three meanings are attributed to the crucifix, especially by those who support it: 1) it is a sacred and religious symbol, 2) it is a symbol of national and Western cultural heritage, and 3) it is a symbol of tolerance and freedom.

The controversial relationship between crucifixes, religious freedom, and pluralism In Italy was brought to the attention of national debate and international jurisprudence with the case of *Lautsi vs Italy*. In 2002, Ms. Soile Tuulikki Lautsi, an Italian citizen of Finnish origin, asked the Abano Terme secondary school, attended by her children, to remove the crucifix from the classrooms. In 2006, the case ended up at the European Court of Human Rights. In an initial ruling, the court unanimously ruled that the display of crucifixes in schools was in contradiction with the neutrality of the state and respected neither the right of parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs nor the right of children to believe or not to believe. However, the ruling was overturned in March 2009. With 15 votes in favour and 2 against, in its final

declaration the Grande Chambre accepted the argument that there was no evidence that crucifixes in schools would have a negative impact on pupils. Therefore, the EctHR endorsed 'the view of the Italian government that the crucifix had to be regarded as a "passive symbol" whose impact on individuals was not comparable with the impact of 'active conduct' (Giorda 2015). Today, as we will see in the next paragraphs, this is a frame largely shared by a high percentage of Italian public opinion and 'the idea, widespread in the debate, that the crucifix is inextricably part of the Italian culture, which is rejected among political actors only by the Radicals and by most of the post-Communist left, also clearly shows that, despite its growing secularisation at the social level, Italy still mostly perceives itself in cultural terms—if not in religious terms—as a Catholic country' (Ozzano & Giorgi, 2016).

Sexual and reproductive rights, immigration, and religious pluralism

Finally, another and last area to be analysed, which goes beyond the contents of the concordat, is the activity of the Church in Italy on the issues of sexual morality, the family and immigration.

After the dissolution of the Christian Democracy Party (DC), which for fifty years had been a hegemonic power in Italian politics and a point of reference for the Catholic electorate, the Church found itself without a parliamentary ally and began to play the role of an independent actor (Ercolessi, 2009; Ozzano & Maritato, 2019). The strategies it started to use were basically three: lobbying activities, appeals to public opinion, and mobilisation of civil society (Ozzano & Maritato, 2019). It was with these tools that it tackled the hot topics of the last decades and, depending on the case, found its allies sometimes in the political actors and parties of the right, and at other times in those of the left or centre-left (Ercolessi, 2009). With regard to reproductive and sexual rights, at least three cases can serve as examples of this renewed role of the Church in Italian politics. The first was the campaign to prevent Law 40 on artificial insemination (approved in 2004 by Silvio Berlusconi's government and very restrictive in its terms) from being repealed by means of a referendum proposed by the Radicals, left-wing parties and movements, and also some exponents of the Right. The Church mobilised Catholic associations in favour of abstention, so that the referendum would fail due to an insufficient number of voters. A quorum was not reached and the referendum did not pass (Martino, 2014). The second example is the Church's strong opposition to same-sex marriages, both in 2003 and in the 2013-2016 campaign (Ozzano, 2015) and which still makes Italy one of the few European countries where this matter is not regulated. Finally, the third example is the Church's recent strong opposition to the Zan decree—the decree against homophobia and transphobia presented

to the Chamber of Deputies in 2020 and never passed. - The Church formalised this opposition by sending a letter claiming that the legislative bill violated the concordat, especially the paragraphs guaranteeing freedom of speech and association to the Church. This most recent event has reopened the public debate on the issue of the legitimacy of the Church to intervene in national politics. In all three of these cases, the Church has proved to be a force capable of mobilising both public opinion and Parliament, even though research today shows that there is now an almost unbridgeable gap between its positions on these issues and the positions of Italians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike (Garelli, 2020).

However, the Church has demonstrated an internal plurality that has been reflected in its relatively progressive positions on, for example, the issues of immigration and pluralism. Starting, in fact, from the beginning of Francis's pontificate, the Church hierarchies have begun to pronounce themselves more and more publicly in favour of supporting immigrants and respecting religious pluralism. These positions are also reflected in Catholic associative activities supporting migrants of all gender, classes and religions, activities that many times cover holes left by the state.

To conclude, it must be emphasised that if on moral and sexual issues the Church has found its major interlocutors mainly in the representatives of right-wing parties, on immigration it finds major allies in those of the left, demonstrating its political transversality and its renewed ability to play in the political sphere as an actor independent of the parties.

3.1.6 Social expectations of the Church and state relations

All the issues explained in the previous paragraphs impact the attitudes of Italians toward the Catholic Church. For this thesis, it is very important to take them into account.

According to Eurispes (2022), slightly more than half of Italians (54.4%) say they trust the Church. This number is certainly high, especially when compared to the respondents' position on other public institutions such as Parliament, but at the same time it shows Italians' ambivalent attitude towards the Church and confirms a relationship characterised by both distance and closeness (Garelli, 2020). Divisions can be found in opinions on the role the church should play in different areas of social life, such as culture, Catholic welfare, politics, or sexuality.

Franco Garelli (2020) identifies some of the elements of the Church that attract greater consensus and others that arouse greater perplexity, if not opposition. In particular, more than two-thirds of the population share the view that the Church has too much power (68.6%), that it intervenes too much in political matters (71.5%), and that there is too much distance between

its doctrinal principles and actual practices (65.4%). One of the issues on which the Church faces the most opposition concerns sexual and family morality. Its positions on sexual and reproductive rights and the family are considered too restrictive and anachronistic, creating a divide between Catholic doctrinal principles and Italian public opinion. The belief that the Church is too restrictive on these matters is now rather widespread across different social categories, and no longer makes Catholic affiliation a predictive criterion for different attitudes, with significant consequences in terms of relations between faith and religious institution. In 2020, the Pew Research Center conducted research to analyse the attitude of Catholics towards same-sex marriages and homosexuality in various countries of the world (Diamant, 2020). The data shows that, among Italian Catholics, 57% support same-sex marriages, and 76% believe that society should accept homosexuality. What seems to prevail, therefore, is the emergence of a certain religious moral autonomy and the prevalence of the idea that following the Church's indications on these issues is not necessarily a criterion of ecclesial belonging (Garelli, 2020).

In the previous paragraphs, we have highlighted some critical points that undermine the effective implementation of secularism in the Italian context. Various authors have described Italian secularism as 'baptised' and 'practicing' (Ferrari, 2008a), or 'fragmented' (Salih, 2009), especially on the basis of certain potentially discriminatory practices such as the treatment of minorities, the 'hour of religion' in State schools, the financing of the Otto per Mille, and the display of crucifixes in State schools. However, looking at the opinions of Italians, a less critical reality emerges, especially on certain pillars of the 1984 Concordat.

According to a survey commissioned by UAAR from Doxa (Doxa, 2021), 83.4% of Italians believe that the principle of secularism is very or fairly important, while 61.4% believe that government policy should be kept separate from religion. At the same time, it is interesting that 76.8% of respondents believe that the State should operate taking beliefs into consideration (in equal measure for believers and non-believers), confirming the prevalence of a conception of secularism like the egalitarian and pluralistic one affirmed by the Constitutional Court.

The situation appears different, however, when analysing the specific arguments. According to Garelli's research (2020), the most critical attitude is reserved for the institution of the Otto per Mille, supported today by only 43.6% of the population, while opposed by 46%, with 10% uncertain. There are various dissenting positions, ranging from criticism of a mechanism that is too opaque, to the desire to stop State funding to the Church. On the other hand, the display of the crucifix in public places meets considerable favour. In fact, 67.5% are in favour, recognising the crucifix as a symbol of the country's religious and cultural history, while 19%

would remove it. Finally, the proportion of Italians who believe that religious instruction should remain as it is—Catholic and optional—seems to be growing. While 50% are in favour of the status quo on the subject, 8.5% would like to see this teaching eliminated and 15.2% would like to see it transformed into a history of religions course.

What emerges from these data is that, although Italians are very critical of various aspects of the Catholic Church, they do not question its religious and cultural primacy in society. However, we see a disparity of views between social and religious groups on these issues (Garelli, 2020) that we did not observe regarding moral and sexual ones. Indeed, the most critical of religious symbols in public spaces and of the religious hour in public schools are atheists, agnostics, and then religious minorities. The vast majority of Catholics are, instead, favourable.

Finally, on all the issues of secularism, great distances are found at the socio-demographic level, with young people and people with a higher educational background declaring themselves less in favour of both the display of the crucifix and the eight per thousand and therefore proving to be the most open to a *de facto* plural and secular society.

3.2 Croatia

3.2.1 Socio-religious profile of Croatia

Croatia is a small country. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (DZS) (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, 2021), its population amounts to 3,871,833 inhabitants. Today, it is a highly religious and predominantly Catholic country. The Pew Research Center classified it as the seventh most religious country in Europe among 34. Catholics represent 78.97% of the population (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, 2021).

In Croatia, the predominance of Catholicism among the population assumes characteristics that are due both to a long-standing historical legacy and more specifically to the events of the last thirty years. From 1945 to 1991, the country was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). As was the case in most Communist countries, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall (1989), the country—for a long time subject to the anti-religious policies of Tito's Communist regime—underwent a process of revitalization of religion, both on a social and individual level (Borowik & Babiński, 1997; Tomka, 1995). In the case of Croatia, this process intersected with a brutal war of independence that led to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, with serious consequences for inter-ethnic relations among the various republics that composed it (Oberschall, 2000). Historically, relations between religion and

nationality/ethnicity had always been very close in the Croatian case, so much so that Jakelić (2010) counted Croatian Catholicism among the so-called 'collectivistic Christianities', namely religions that are 'public in manifestation and have institutional authority structure' and that 'shape identities that distinguish their members from other religious groups, identities that members are often willing to die for'.

After the war, however, this bond intensified, taking on political and nationalist connotations and turning religion into a demarcation of differences among the three main ethnic groups involved in the war: Croats (Catholics), Serbs (Orthodox), and Bosniaks (Muslims) (Perica, 2002; Vrčan, 1994).

Nevertheless, although Catholicism plays a central role in the everyday social and political life of Croats, the Croatian religious landscape is more complicated. Processes of de-secularisation and de-privatisation of religion exist alongside pluralising tendencies and secularising trends. Comparing data on religious affiliations provides important information on the changing religious landscape in Croatia. As in the Italian case, although to a different extent and for different historical reasons, these changes concern: 1) the Catholic camp; 2) an increase in non-religious people; and 3) demographic changes in the form of religious and confessional pluralism. First of all, data show a consistent decline in those who self-declare themselves Catholic, from almost 88% in 2011 to 78.9% in 2021 (see (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, 2021) . This figure is even more significant if we add to it the results on some indicators of religiosity—such as the frequency of religious rites or trust in the church institution—collected between 1999 and 2018. In this time frame, people who attend church weekly decreased from 31.6% in 1999 to 22.6% in 2018. At the same time, people who never attend church, in the same years, increased from 10% to 19%. The same applies to trust in the church: whereas in 1999, people who said they trusted the church a lot were 62.8%, today they are only 38.4%. What remains unchanged, by contrast, are the scores on personal religiosity.

Tab. 3.3

Religious affiliations in Croatia between 2001 and 2021

Religions	2001	2011	2021
Catholics	87.97	86.28	78.97
Orthodox	4.42	4.44	3.32
Protestants	0.27	0.34	0.26
Other Christians	0.24	0.30	4.83
Muslims	1.28	1.47	1.32
Jews	0.01	0.06	0.01
Oriental religions	0.02	0.06	0.09
Other religions	0.1	0.06	0.96
Agnostics and Sceptics	0.03	0.76	1.68
Not Religious and Atheist	2.22	3.81	4.71
Not Declared	2.95	2.17	1.72
Unknown	0.58	0.27	1.14

Notes. Data are from "Population by ethnicity and religion, 2021 census", by Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, 2021, (https://podaci.dzs.hr/en/statistics/population/).

These are data that come from recent research by Nikodem and Zrinščak (2019) and lead them to conclude that, even though Croatia remains a country characterised by a widespread religiosity, today there is a progressive polarisation between believers who have a strong and institutionalised religiosity and others who instead experience what the two authors define as 'distant religiosity'. In addition to this, Nikodem and Zrinščak observe a strong correlation between personal, institutionalised religiosity and right-wing political orientation, suggesting that in Croatia today religion has become not only an identity factor but also the basis for ideological orientation.

The second feature that emerges from the census is the rise in the number of atheists and agnostics, which went from 2.25% to 6.39%. As we have mentioned, after the collapse of communism, Catholicism became an important marker of Croatian identity, and the Catholic Church assumed a prominent role in the public sphere, politics, media and schools. In this context, religiosity became a socially desirable trait, while non-religiosity was seen as an anti-conformist stance, so much so that the percentages of those who declared themselves non-religious from 1984 to 2004 dropped dramatically (Bajić, 2020). Nowadays, non-religiosity is

more present among the younger generations and urbanised and educated people (Nikodem & Zrinščak, 2016).

Finally, it is fair to look at Croatian religious minorities and religious diversity. At the moment, there are 54 religious minorities officially registered in Croatia (Marinovic and Josipovic, 2019). Looking at the census, one sees that the numbers of people declared to belong to minorities historically present in Croatia (Orthodox, Muslims, Jews, Protestant) are slightly diminishing. At the same time, the number of those identifying themselves as members of oriental or other religions is marked by a light increase. Therefore, the situation is still far from demographic pluralism such as that of Italy, capable of challenging the Catholic Church's religious monopoly, but there are slight signs of change that it is right to consider.

The current Croatian religious landscape is the result of different historical and political circumstances that have marked the history of the country as well as of most of the Eastern and Central European regions. In the case of Croatia, the Church-State development partly reflects general post-communist circumstances, partly consequences of war/transition events, and partly general European dilemmas and conflicts about Church and State (Zrinščak et al., 2014). We will look more closely at them in the following paragraphs.

3.2.2 From socialist secularism to politicization of religion

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and religion

Despite the growing interest in secularism, few scholarly works have paid attention to secularism's forms in former socialist states, particularly in Southeastern Europe. However, this period of socialist secularism was a very important phase in Croatian history that profoundly affected the current attitudes of the population towards religion, both in terms of religiosity and the political and social role of the Catholic Church in the country.

From 1945 to 1991, Croatia was part of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, led by Marshal Josep Broz Tito. It was characterised by a form of socialism distinct from that of the USSR, for at least five reasons: 1) an economic model based on workers' self-management, 2) the following of the principle of non-alignment in foreign politics and the consequent international recognition, 3) the existence of a multi-communist-party system, 4) the possibility of travel beyond borders for the Yugoslavia's citizens, and 5) the spread of Western culture among youth and ordinary people (Ognjenović & Jozelić, 2016).

Concerning religion, according to some authors, the communist regime represented a model of *ideological secularism*, close to the French model of laïcité (Zrinščak et al., 2014). However,

whereas in the French case, State efforts to impose secularism are focused exclusively on the public sphere, the Yugoslav secular model was far more comprehensive in trying to radically reshape the approach to religion with the ideological purpose of overcoming it (Ballinger & Ghodsee, 2011).

In Yugoslavia, indeed, the socialist approach to religion was based on two pillars: first, the juridical separation of Church and State and a narrow interpretation of religious freedom as the freedom to worship or not to worship; second, the construction of a path that, based on Leninist-inspired principles, was to lead the working classes to abandon superstitions and religious practices in order to foster social and individual liberation (Mojzes, 1986).

This was the "double reality" of socialism and religion: on the one hand, the government guaranteed religious freedom and autonomy of religious communities, on the other hand, it favoured non-religious worldviews and treated believers as second-class citizens (Zrinščak et al., 2014).

In Yugoslavia, the history of State and religion passed through different phases that in part reflected the path of the relations between Tito's government and the USSR. After the Tito-Stalin split, the direct control and repressions of the first period were replaced by a more ideological approach to religion which emphasised socialist modernisation in relation to the anti-modern superstition represented by religion, viewed as an impediment to individual liberation and emancipation (Ballinger & Ghodsee, 2011).

According to Paul Mojzes (1986), it is possible to trace five different phases of State/religion relations in Yugoslavia. The first lasted from 1945 to 1953 and was characterised by violent attacks against religions despite claims to religious liberty. The second saw a reduction of the pressures on religious communities, although excesses of violence were also recorded. This was also the time when the differentiation in the treatment of different communities was most pronounced. The third phase took place during the years between 1965 and 1971, when the State took a more liberal approach to religion. In this period, for instance, churches were allowed to publish, and theological schools were expanded in number. However, this was also the moment in which the regime began to develop more concerns about chauvinism and its links with religion. From 1972 to 1983, during what can be considered the fourth phase of the relationship between the socialist State and religion, the state began to exercise greater control over religion and the Christian-Marxist dialogue came to a halt. Finally, on 4th May 1980, Tito died, opening up a new phase of confusion and conflicts between nations, which led to the war of the 1990s and the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, a prelude to the link between religion

and nationalism and the assumption of a strong political role for the Churches in almost all regions of the former socialist federation.

After the fall of communism: the politicisation of Catholicism

Following the collapse of Tito's socialist regime, Croatia experienced many of the features that characterised religious changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Jerolimov and Jokić (2010) summarise them: the revitalisation of religion both in terms of social and political weight and in terms of collective and personal religiosity, the strengthening of the link between nation and religion, the politicisation of religion, the growth of new religious movements, and the aspiration of the traditional churches to regain the role they had before the pre-communist era. However, unlike countries of the post-soviet bloc, the fall of Yugoslavia was accompanied by a devastating civil war among all the republics of the former socialist federation. In Croatia, this had relevant consequences at the social and political level. In this context, the already existing religious differences between the various republics were exploited by the political forces to facilitate the construction of new ethnic-nationalist States (Iveković, 2002; Perica, 2002). Religious symbols and sentiments were a driving force for mass mobilisation and acted as identity markers, battlefield demarcations, and 'the best means of identifying legitimate targets for destruction' (Vrčan, 1994).

These processes had many implications. First, this resulted in an exponential increase in religious affiliations: while in 1987 64.9% of Croats declared themselves Catholic and 27.4% non-affiliated, in 1999 Catholics made up 87.97% and non-religious about 5% of the population. Since the process of building the different (and new) nation-states found its legitimation in religion, confession turned into a hallmark of nationhood, and to be Catholic started to mean to be Croat, just as to be Orthodox meant to be Serbian.

Second, the war changed the social positions of religious communities, and in particular of 'national' Churches, moving them 'from an essentially extrasystemic or even counter systemic position to occupy a systemic or suprasystemic position' (Vrčan, 1994). In the case of Croatia, the Catholic Church and the government began to forge increasingly close relations with the leading right-wing party HDZ, so much so that some authors consider the Church the main promoter of a neoconservative revolution in postwar Croatia and proponent of the legitimization of Franjo Tudjman's ultra-nationalist ideology. Even though the positions within the Church were diverse, with some parts closer to conservative nationalist stances and others more critical towards the new nationalist developments of Church and State relations (Bellamy, 2002), it is proved that after the war the Church gained a prominent social and political position.

For this period, authors spoke about processes of 'religionalization of politics' (Vrčan 1994) or 'politicization of religion' (Iveković, 2002) to describe the process of 'reintroduction into politics of ultimate references' (Vrčan, 1994, p. 375) and the use of religion to construct new not only national but also political identities and ideologies (Ivekovic, 2002, p. 524).

Newspapers increasingly reported about Church events, Church representatives were very often present in the media, and religious symbols spread in the public sphere, also to the detriment of other historical religious minorities, who were instead marginalised from the public sphere and debate (Bremer, 2010).

These were also the years in which the State regulated the relationships with the Church in juridical terms (Bremer, 2010). After long negotiations, the government signed four agreements with the Holy See: an Agreement on Legal Issues, an Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Education and Culture, an Agreement on Spiritual Care in the Military and Police Forces, and an Agreement on Economic Issues. They regulated numerous rights: ' from acknowledgement of [Church] full legal entity, cooperation with the State in numerous fields (education, culture, social services, military and police, etc.) to the partial co-funding from the state budget' (Zrinščak, 2014, p. 118).

These regulations, together with the Constitutional principle of separation between Church and State, on the one hand, placed Croatia among the European family of the concordatarian States (Zrinščak, 2014), and on the other, provoked polemics over the conflict between the secularity of the state and the pre-eminent role of the Church (Bahijć, 2020), similar to those we have seen in the Italian context.

3.2.3 Church-state relations and religious freedom in Croatia: legal framework and main problems

Today, Croatia is a secular democracy, as stated by art. 41 of its Constitution which reads:

> All religious communities shall be equal before the law and separate from the state. Religious communities shall be free, in compliance with the law, to publicly conduct religious services, open schools, colleges or other institutions, and welfare and charitable organizations and to manage them, and they shall enjoy the protection and assistance of the state in their activities.

Religious freedom, religious rights, and principles of non-discrimination based on these rights are stated in art. 14, 17, 39, and 40 of the Constitution.

However, despite its legislation's respect for equality and separation, as in many other European countries characterised by the presence of strong religion, Croatia faces some problems with the full implementation of secularism, and some crucial areas of its system are still charged with potentially discriminatory practices.

The Act on the Legal Status of Religious communities

After the war, religious minorities in Croatia were free to operate, even though their existence was not regulated by any legal framework. In 2002, the first leftist government after independence, led by the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP), enacted the Act on the Legal Status of Religious communities. The government recognized religious communities as autonomous social organisations and established that they were largely free from legal and administrative regulations. The act accorded many of the Catholic Church's rights to the other religious communities as well, even though it did not accord to them all of those rights and subjected them to further regulations. Indeed, the Act was promulgated a few years after the signing of the agreements between the governments and the Holy See, and this had an influence on shaping the different positions of the Catholic Church and other religious minorities in society (Zrinščak, 2004).

In particular, the law of 2002 differentiated between already existing religious communities, which the State asked to complete a formal request for recognition, and new ones, which instead had to fulfil specific requirements to obtain registration. These included proving that they had been registered as an association for at least five years and that they had at least 500 members. Moreover, in art. 9 of the Act[11], the law provided for the possibility of signing agreements between Croatia and religious communities on issues of 'mutual interest', such as religious education in public schools, chaplaincy in military and police forces and in health and social institutions, financing of Churches, state regulation of Church weddings, etc. The question was who defines 'issues of mutual interest' and how. Further problems occurred when, in 2004, the government formulated new criteria, which specified two more basic conditions that the religious communities should fulfil in order to sign the agreement: 1) to function continuously and as a legally recognized community on the territory of the Republic of Croatia from at least 6 April 1941, 2) to have at least 6,000 members according to the last census, or to

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[11] The text of article 9: 'Issues of mutual interest for the Republic of Croatia and one or several religious communities can be settled by a separate Agreement signed by the Croatian Government and a religious community'.

be one of the traditional religious organisations of the country (the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Church in Croatia, the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia, the Islamic community, or the Jewish Community). Today, Croatia has a total of 55 registered religious communities (U.S. State Department, 2021) and the government has signed an agreement with 14 Churches and religious communities[12]. As in the case of Italy, government regulations on registration or agreement processes in Croatia result in a hierarchical or pyramidal system of pluralism management. As Zrinščak (2014) writes, in the case of Croatia this system has three levels:

> The first tier is occupied by the Catholic Church due to international agreements which guarantee its rights but also due to its position and overall social role and influence…The second tier comprises religions that have agreements with the Government in place. The third tier comprises all other religious communities which are registered as such and which, on the basis of this registration can operate freely, but as they do not have an agreement with the Government they cannot enjoy additional rights, such as having confessional education in public schools, official (*eo ipso*) recognition of religious marriage, funding from the state's budget etc (p.119).

3.2.4 Other issues on secularism and religious freedom

The question about the complex relations among registration, religious freedom, and management of religious pluralism is not the only problematic spot: other crucial topics are religious education and the interference of the Church on sexual and reproductive issues.

Religious education

As in the case of Italy, when it comes to secularism, one of the most debated issues in Croatia is the role of **religious education** in public schools. Religious education was introduced in Croatian scholastic system in the 1990s for the various denominations as an official (optional) part of the Croatian school curriculum[13]. Unlike Italy, in addition to the Catholic Church, today the Orthodox Church, the Islamic community, the Jewish community, the Adventists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can teach religion in public schools. Regarding those who make use of the two hours of religious instruction, Zrinščak et al. (2014) report:

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[12] This part (history and specific parts) on the Act is taken from Zrinščak et al. (2014)

[13] Information for this chapter is taken from Zrinščak et al. (2014) and Bobinac and Jerolimov (2008).

In the year 2009/2010, in primary schools 345,914 pupils (93.6%) attended Catholic religious instruction, 2,792 pupils attended Islamic religious instruction and 2,051 pupils attended Orthodox religious instruction, therefore only a small minority of children do not attend any religious class. In secondary schools (where children can choose between religious instruction and ethics) 132,673 pupils (75.4%) attended Catholic religious instruction,18 437 pupils attended Islamic religious instruction (another 1,407 pupils of different grades attended Islamic religious instruction in mosques), and 849 pupils attended Orthodox religious instruction.

In the 1990s, the introduction of religious instruction after years of communism was followed by an access debate, which divided theologians and the more conservative wings of the Church from liberal intellectuals and representatives of religious minorities. While the former, in fact, were in favour of confessional teaching, actually equating religious instruction with the catechism, the latter proposed non-confessional teaching of religious culture, so as to avoid attempts at proselytism and preserve the secularity of the state. The second approach prevailed (Zrinščak et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that the presence of other religious minorities in the school may make the Croatian education system appear more egalitarian than the Italian one, in reality there are conditions that make the hours of religious instruction *de facto* hours of Catholic religious instruction.

The teaching of the Catholic Church is regulated by the agreements made by the Croatian government with the Holy See between 1996-1998, in particular by the 'Contract between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia about cooperation in the field of education and culture'. The contract invites the State to 'take into account the irreplaceable historical and present role of the Catholic Church in Croatia in the cultural and moral upbringing of the people, and also its role in the field of culture and education'. As Bobinac and Jerolimov (2008) explain, the contract:

regulates Catholic religious instruction (catechism) in public primary and secondary schools as an optional subject equal to other subjects, the number of students needed in order to organise the class (seven pupils), the obligation of church and school authorities to inform parents and pupils about the goals and the content of the subject, the number of hours per week (two), competence for drawing up the curriculum (the Croatian Conference of Bishops) and for confirming it (the Minister of Education); responsibility for the training of teachers, and the level of education needed for the

teachers. The Croatian Conference of Bishops is obliged to submit to the Ministry a list of teacher-training institutions. The National Catechetic Institute is responsible for all Catholic religious instruction in schools. The diocesan bishop and a counsellor in the diocesan office for catechism together take care of religious instruction in preschool institutions and in primary and secondary schools (Bobinac and Jerolimov, 2008, p.47).

Based on article 2 of this agreement, another contract between the Croatian government and the Croatian Conference of Bishops was signed. It contains two articles (11 and 12) that differentiate treatment from that of other religions, making the hour of religion, actually the Catholic hour. In Article 11, it is specified that the Catholic religion is part of Croatia's cultural heritage and for this reason, it will be taken into account in the Croatian education system, and also through the realisation of cultural initiatives and programs that concern aspects of life that go beyond the school system. Catholic rites, for example, may also be celebrated within schools, following authorization by the school authorities and with participation on a voluntary basis. Article 12, on the other hand, allows parish priests to perform religious instructions even several times a week (Bobinac and Jerolimov, 2008, p.48).
As Marinović (2018) writes:

> Unlike some other countries (Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, England), in Croatia, religious education is a subject that not only provides knowledge about belief but also teaches to believe (as in Ireland, Scotland, Austria, and Germany). Therefore, it is primarily the teaching of one particular faith, and only secondarily a presentation of other religious and non-religious views of life. It is a subject that complementary to parish (catechism) is mostly aimed at aiding the transmission of such religious knowledge (tradition) as is also received in the family and church (which were for decades the only settings for this transmission) (Marinović, 2018, p.130).

However, Zrinščak et al. (2014) report that, according to three research studies conducted between 1989 and 2004, the societal support for religious education has changed over the years. In 1989, 68% of adults declared themselves in favour of a greater role in religious education; in 1996, 65% of respondents thought that religious education ought to be optional, and 7% that it ought to be removed from schools (28% wanted it mandatory). In 2004, 48% of respondents were in favour of confessional education, while 26% would have preferred religious culture; among the pupils, 48% were for it, while 52% were against confessional religious instruction. Finally, the authors also report interesting data about teachers' stances on the subject: 34% think that religious instruction should not be conducted in public schools.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Beginning in the early 2010s, coinciding with the translation of American culture wars to Europe (Kuhar & Paternotte 2017), the Church in Croatia, too, together with the more conservative civil society organisations gravitating around it, began to politicise issues related to **women's and LGBT sexual and reproductive rights[14]**. In 2012, Vigilare, an organisation linked to anti-gender movements (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017), launched a civic initiative to oppose a New Bill on Medically Assisted Reproduction that made embryo freezing and artificial insemination possible for single women. In this battle, the association received letters of support from the Croatian bishops' conference. The bill passed, but at the same time, another debate was opened on sex education at school. The government wanted to include a health education program in the school curriculum, which contained a module on sexuality. The module included three hours on gender and sexual diversity, religious minorities, and discrimination. Vigilare, along with other opposing organisations, argued that the program aimed to sexualize children and promote homosexuality. In December of the same year, demonstrations were organised in 20 cities in Croatia entitled 'Stay away from my Childhood!' The bishops' conference again offered its support and published a pamphlet calling on all parents to oppose the government's program. Until the autumn of 2013, the program was suspended, then it was decided to pass it despite the controversy.

In 2013, however, the conservative organisation *U ime obitelji*, with the support of the Catholic Church, collected 743,316 signatures to hold a referendum on the possibility of including the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman in the constitution, with the aim of protecting the 'natural family' and discrediting homosexuality and same-sex couples. The proposal passed with two-thirds of voters voting in favour, and today, Article 62 of the Croatian Constitution reads: 'marriage is the living unity of a woman and a man'.

These are just a few examples of the relationship between the Church and the public sphere regarding family, sexual and reproductive issues. However, while this phenomenon is rooted in the historical link between nationalism and religion, and in the case of Croatia takes on specific characteristics such as anti-secularist and anti-communist stances, it also represents the other side of Croatian collectivist Catholicism and its links to global conservative groups

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[14] The historical reconstructions of events made in this part of the chapter are taken from Kuhar (2015) and Hodžić & Štulhofer (2017).

and processes of ideological recomposition between religion, politics, and nationhood (Jakelić, 2021).

3.2.5 Idiosyncratic pluralism and societal discriminations toward religious minorities

In a country, such as Croatia, characterised by a strong monopoly of the Church and with the majority of its inhabitants being Catholic, the question arises about the relationship between diversity and pluralism (Giordan & Pace, 2014) and how religious minorities are perceived by the majority.

As Zrinščak (2014) points out, in Croatia the top-down management of pluralism is based on a strange idiosyncrasy whereby, despite the great privileges granted to the Catholic Church, at the legislative level the practices of accommodation of religious minorities seem more inclusive than in other European countries.

The war of the 1990s saw three ethnic groups in particular that were previously part of the former Yugoslavia: the Croats (Catholics), the Serbs (Orthodox), and the Bosniaks (Muslims). The ethnic divisions that were brought about by the conflict continue to mark their ethnic coexistence, creating societal and political conflicts and tensions. Yet, shortly after the promulgation of the Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities, the Croatian government signed an agreement with both the Orthodox Church and the Muslim community. The agreements recognized a number of rights, such as the right to religious education in public schools, to found their institutions with financial support from the state, recognition of religious marriage, etc. The choice depended both on the fact that these were communities that had historically always inhabited the region (united among other things with the Croats by the same language and culture) and on the objective of being part of the European Union. The fact is that today Croatia is one of the few European countries to have formally recognised Islam.

The situation might seem different when looking at the social discrimination of minorities, an area in which war and the strong links between nationality and religiosity take their weight.

In 2018, Fox, Finke, an Mataic published 'New data and measures on societal discrimination and religious minorities' report. It shows that Croatia, despite having a low moderate level of discrimination of religious minorities by the state, is among the countries with the highest score for social discrimination of religion. By social discrimination, the three authors mean all discriminatory actions towards religious minorities committed by non-state actors. These can range from violent acts, such as hate crimes, to preventing the construction of places of worship, hate speech, to discrimination in the economic or employment sphere.

Given the strong link among religion, ethnicity, and nation in the region, this finding is not surprising. However, this same link suggests that it is not easy to distinguish discriminatory acts on an ethnic basis from those on a religious basis. The task is not made any easier by the fact that, for this reason, even at the sociological level, there is little research that deals with the social distance between the various religious communities (e.g.., Malenica et al., 2019; Previšić, 1996), in spite of much that deals with ethnic distance (e.g., Banovac & Boneta, 2006; Katunarić, 1991; Šiber, 1997). Among the former, some interesting data can be found in Jerolimov (2008): studying the 'social distance' among the various religious groups, the author discovers a number of findings. First, she observes a general social distance towards all religions except Catholics, and less social distance towards non-religious people than towards 'religious others', by which she means the new religious movements or the 'sects'. Secondly, she records a greater closeness between Catholics and the Orthodox and Muslims, compared to other new religious communities (meaning those that have existed on Croatian territory for more than a century).

Combining these data and reflections on the legislative accommodation of Islam and the Orthodox Church, some conclusions can be drawn. First, one notes a generally suspicious attitude towards the 'new' religions, fomented also by the Catholic Church, which, from school textbooks to its opposition to the holding of yoga courses for teachers in schools, has always sought to deny authenticity and respectability to the new faiths.

Second, one observes an ambivalent attitude towards traditional confessions both by the state and by society, leading to speculate that in this case, the social distance is more a direct consequence of the war than an 'ontological' attitude (Jerolimov, 2008), and that as such it can vary as history evolves.

This sheds new light on relevant empirical and theoretical assumptions, 'particularly that a society is much more than the entity produced by religion and ethnic links' (Zrinščak, 2014).

The collectivist character of Croatian Catholicism (Jakelić, 2010), the high number of Catholics, and the processes of politicisation and ethnicisation of religion could lead to a prejudiced assumption of a society homogeneously closed to religious otherness. Instead, without denying the intolerance and social prejudice against religious minorities, what emerges from the juridical and empirical analysis is the existence in Croatia of another pattern of pluralism that combines different 'historical and contemporary factors' and that defeats the idea that collectivist religions are essentially anti-modern and intolerant (Zrinščak, 2014).

This model of pluralism is challenging. It proposes that the destination in the encounters with different others is not a movement toward some universal notion of humanity, and it is certainly not a progress toward new 'prescriptive and normative understandings' that will reify differences (Klassen & Bender, 2010, p.12). Instead of pluralism as another form of governance of differences, religious pluralism in the contemporary Croatian context is historically and culturally embedded in ways that uphold and seek to appreciate and understand that which separates us. This small nation is an instance of lived religious identities which underscores that, in modernity just as before it, pluralism can be pluralism only if it is truly constituted by deep differences—only if it allows for encounters with others to be an opportunity for reflexivity, and in its best variation, a chance to see ourselves 'with the eyes of others' (Jakelić, 2021, p.578).

3.2.6 Social expectations regarding the social and political role of religion in Croatia

The religious landscape of Croatia, as is the case for many post-communist countries, has been investigated mainly through the theoretical lens of the 'revitalisation' of religiosity and the politicisation of the dominant Catholic Church. Themes such as the relations between religion and nationalism, the social position of the dominant churches and religious minorities, and the role of the churches in the processes of democratic transition have occupied a large part of the sociological research on religion in this area. Alongside these, especially in recent years, research has begun to emerge on the processes of secularisation, which have shown how in many post-communist countries coexist collectivistic and individualised forms of religiosity (Nikodem & Zrinščak, 2016).

Few, however, have been research studies that have investigated how people perceive the public role of the Church and how they expect it to behave in the various spheres of social view (e.g.. Ančić, 2011; Zrinščak, 2011). Among those of particular interest is the one by Zrinščak and Ančić (2012). Using data from the Aufbruch research project and the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), the two authors analysed people's views on the social role of the Church in thirteen states of post-communist Europe.

Their empirical research on Croatia shows very interesting results for the purposes of this thesis. In particular, three points deserve to be highlighted.

The first is about what people expect from the social action of the Church and in what areas of life they think it is more able to intervene.

As shown in Tab.3.4, the highest expectations (64.5%) are linked to its ability to respond to questions about the meaning of life. Then, to moral problems and needs of individuals (56.3%) and, finally, to problems of family life (55.1%). By contrast, there is a lower level of expectations for its capacity to act upon social problems (37.2%).

Tab. 3.4

Croats' expectations on the role of Church in various spheres of social life (%)

	%
Moral problems and needs of individuals	56.3
Problems of family life	55.1
Questions about the meaning of life	64.5
Actual social problems in our country	37.2

Notes. Data are from "Religion in Central European societies: Its social role and people's expectations", by B. Ančić and S. Zrinščak, 2012, in *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, 5(1), 21-38.

The second point is about what social issues, according to people, the Church is allowed to deal with (Tab.3.5).

First of all, Croatian respondents think that the Church can deal with problems related to the rise of social inequalities (70,3%) and unemployment (58%). As Ančić and Zrinščak (2012) point out, this is in line with Croats' distrust in the capacity of political institutions to resolve these issues.

Tab. 3.5

Social issues on which the Croats believe the Church is entitled to intervene

	%
Unemployment	58
Abortion	48.8
Extramarital Relations	50.7
Same-sex relations	52.1
Growing social differences	70.3
Politics of the government	30.1

Notes. Data are from "Religion in Central European societies: Its social role and people's expectations", by B. Ančić and S. Zrinščak, 2012, in *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, 5(1), 21-38.

Second, Croats are divided about family, sexual and reproductive issues: while a very slight majority think that it is appropriate for the Church to deal with same-sex relations (52.1%) and extramarital relations (50.7%), there is less agreement on abortion, supported only by 48.8% of respondents.

Finally, it is interesting to notice that the lowest score regards relations between Church and politics. Only 30% of Croats believe that the Church should be allowed to deal with the politics of government.

This is data strongly supported by additional analysis made by the two authors on this topic on a third group of questions about religious leaders' influence on voting and government. According to the results, a large majority of respondents strongly oppose the intervention of religion in politics. Despite the high level of religiosity in Croatia and the strong recognition of the public role of religion, there is a shared refusal that religion should influence voting and governmental politics (see (Tab.3.6).

Tab. 3.6

Croats opinions on religious leaders' influence on politics

	%
Religious leaders should not influence people's vote	84.6
Religious leaders should not influence the government	80.5

Notes. Data are from "Religion in Central European societies: Its social role and people's expectations", by B. Ančić and S. Zrinščak, 2012, in *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, 5(1), 21-38.

What emerges is the image of a country that, although it recognises the socio-cultural value of the traditional religion, and even though has been protagonist of many processes that lead to a politicisation of Catholicism, opposes the influence of dominant religion on politics, in line with a tendency present in many other European countries.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have analysed the Italian and the Croatian context, focusing on their socio-religious profile, the history of their Church and State relations, and highlighting the main problems they face in the implementation of secularism and religious freedom. Moreover, we have looked at social expectations on these issues, in order to verify whether there was a rupture or continuity between the institutional arrangements and public opinion.

Although predominantly Catholic countries, Italy and Croatia come from very different histories that reflect their socio-religious image, their institutional arrangements, and the forms of their internal societal debates on religious issues. However, during this analysis, we have seen that they are more similar than we had imagined.

Some authors have talked about the emergence of a common pattern of Church-State relations in Europe which envisages the recognition of a separation between the two institutions, and 'substantial respect of individual religious freedom, guarantee of the autonomy and, in particular, the self-administration of the religious denominations, and selective collaborations of the states with the churches' (Ferrari in Zrinščak, 2011). Indeed, looking at the two case studies presented here, it seems that there are more similarities than differences in the legal arrangements between the two states, confirming the hypothesis of Zrinščak et al. (2014) that Western European and Communist countries share the same contradictions and dilemmas on this issue. From the empirical analysis, we, therefore, expect to observe similar patterns of religious freedom perceptions, even though we presume that Italians will show a higher support compare to Croatians, on all the three investigated aspects. Moreover, we expect similar results on the assessment of the relationship between religion and politics and an equal general predominance in support for *institutional secularism* rather than *establishment* model. However, we also presume that in Croatia, due to the strong link between religion and nationalism and the higher number of practising Catholics, *establishment* will be more widely supported than in Italy. At the same time, given the lower number of non-believers in Croatia, the lower level of politicisation and polarisation of the debate on religious issues, and the experience of socialist secularism, we expect there will be less support in Croatia for *ideological secularism*, with a lower relevance of the effects we hypothesised it might have on the various dimensions of religious freedom.

Chapter 4
Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and the methodology used in this thesis. Research design enables the researcher to achieve research objectives and respond to research questions as unambiguously as possible (de Vaus, 2001). The present work aimed to assess how different normative positions on the relations between politics and religion influence the social perception of religious freedom (SPRF) among Italian and Croatian university students. We distinguished among three State/religion/society models: *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and the *establishment model* and three dimensions of SPRF (*Rf as a societal value*, *Rf as an individual value*, and *Rf as the freedom to express religion*).

Given the interplay, already noted in the literature review, between historical and cultural contexts, political and religious identities, and different orientations toward secularism and religious freedom, to reach this general aim, four objectives were set: 1) to compare social perceptions about religious freedom in Italy and Croatia; 2) to compare the social perceptions of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* model in Italy and Croatia; 3) to find out the effects of religious and political identities on the perceptions of *institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*; 4) to test the impacts of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* on the three dimensions (societal, individual, expression of religion) of religious freedom.

To achieve these objectives, we adopted an empirical perspective. Following a trend that has emerged in religious freedom and human rights studies in the last two decades (par. 4.1), we designed a cross-national comparative survey.

Research design deals 'with a *logical* problem and not a *logistical* problem' (Yin, 1989, p.29, in de Vaus, 2001). It does not concern only the practical work plan but also the broader question 'What evidence do I need to collect?' and the philosophical assumptions and practical tools that the researcher needs to respond to it (de Vaus, 2001). Therefore, the chapter proceeds as follows. First, it explains why we opted for quantitative research and illustrates the methodological/epistemological premise. Second, it describes how the main steps of survey research were addressed: this part presents the research instrument, the sampling technique, and the mode(s) of data collection. Third, it describes the variables, reporting factor analysis results, reliability, and collinearity tests. Fourth, it illustrates the statistical analysis techniques

performed to describe the data and test the hypotheses. Finally, it comments on the limitations of the present research design and draws some suggestions for further research.

4.1 Cross-national survey research and religious freedom

Cross-national surveys refer to those studies which are conducted in two or more countries and whose design, implementation, and organisation are shaped by the concept of comparability or equivalence' (Behr et al., 2016, p.1). In the last decades, such surveys have seen extensive development, and today they are widely used even in non-scientific fields (Harkness, 2007). The reasons for this development can be found in the advantages they bring in practical and theoretical terms. Practically, they enable the creation of large databases and can serve as tools to test the impact of policy initiatives and develop new ones on a global scale (Emery & Caporali, 2019). Theoretically, they have led to greater transnational integration of the social sciences and the development of social theory, allowing a deeper understanding of some critical issues and opening up new and unexpected research perspectives (Nowak, 1977).

In the last decades, the emergence of a vast group of studies has shown the importance of quantitative approaches and survey research on religious freedom to respond to the lack of cross-national data that 'severely handicapped social sciences' ability to study the topic' (Grim & Finke, 2007, p.654).

Some of these studies have looked at religious freedom's institutional dimensions and the conditions that foster its protection or violations. They empirically establish what political, social, and cultural factors determine restrictions on religious freedom in different countries around the world and the consequences of these restrictions (e.g., Akbaba & Fox 2011; Akbaba & Taydas 2011; Finke & Martin, 2014; Finke et al., 2017; Grim & Finke, 2007; Grim & Finke, 2011; Fox 2008; Fox et al., 2019; Sarkissian et al., 2011).

Others, instead, have focused on the culture of human rights, looking primarily at the role religion plays in the social reception and interpretation of human rights at the societal level (Vander Ven & Ziebertz 2012, 2013; Ziebert & Črpić, 2015; Ziebertz & Zaccaria, 2021). These studies were quantitative research projects, often designed as surveys, that analysed the impact of variables such as religiosity (Sjöborg, 2013), values (Ziebertz & Reindl, 2013), social conflicts (Botvar & Sjöborg, 2018), and citizenship status (Vander Ven & Ziebertz, 2012) on a wide range of civil, political, and social rights (e.g., Van der Ven, 2013; Ziebertz, 2020). Their focus was not only on religious freedom (yet, on this topic, see Adimekwe & Ziebertz, 2018; Francis et al., 2018), but they have been inspirational as they propose a human rights

research methodology that can clarify the factors that induce or reduce people's support for them.

4.2 SPRF as an epistemological and methodological approach

The strand of studies mentioned above also includes the theory on the social perception of religious freedom (SPRF)[15], which served as this research project's epistemological and methodological framework (see, e.g., Breskaya & Giordan, 2019; Breskaya et al. 2021; Breskaya et al. 2022). The study of SPRF aims to explore the societal perceptions of religious freedom in a comparative perspective and 'to measure the interplay of the subjective meaning of religious freedom with the other layers of its construction as well as consider the possible socio-political and socio-religious factors that foster and impede its perception' (Breskaya & Giordan, 2019, p.4). Epistemologically, SPRF is informed by a socio-constructionist approach, in that it understands religious freedom as a societally constructed concept, whose social meaning changes according to cultural, political, and social processes occurring in specific times and places. Methodologically, SPRF suggests using a cross-national comparative survey methodology, justified by its goal of grasping the mechanisms governing the reception of religious freedom on a global scale and its twofold orientation toward both the development of a sociological theory of religious freedom and the construction of more effective policies for its protection[16].

4.3 Research process

The design of a cross-national survey involves performing several steps, both theoretical and empirical in nature, whose quality influences the success of the entire project (Groves et al., 2004). Among these, the most crucial is the design of the questionnaire, its pretest, the sampling of the target population, the choice of modes to collect data, and their statistical analysis (e.g., Glasow, 2005; Leeuw et al., 2007; Scheuren, 2004; Spector, 2013). In comparative cross-national surveys, another critical step is the translation of the questionnaire into the languages

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[15] See Ch.1, par.1.8.

[16] On social constructionism see Burr (2015). Traditionally, for their quantitative nature, social surveys have been placed in the category of positivist research. However, several authors have questioned this one-to-one equivalence between survey/quantitative research and positivism (Babones, 2016; Finlay, 1998; Kingdon, 2005; Marsh, 1979; Ryan and Golde, 2006; Usher, 2021). This research project accommodates these new developments by coupling an epistemology commonly referred to as qualitative research (social constructionism) with quantitative research methods.

in which it must be administered (Emeri & Caporali, 2019; Harkness, 2007; Johnson, 1998). The following paragraphs describe how all these stages were addressed in the context of this research.

4.3.1 Research team

To better understand some of the components and procedures used in the adopted research design, it is necessary to emphasise that this work was part of a larger research project involving professors, researchers and Ph.D. students from various parts of the world. This group aimed to study the social perception of religious freedom from a comparative perspective by submitting a standard questionnaire called *Religion and Citizenship* (see par.4.3.2) in different countries (Italy, Croatia, Poland, Uruguay, France, and India). The general research project was animated by different questions and aimed to evaluate the impact of many variables on the production of different societal meanings of religious freedom. Every researcher involved could focus on one (or more) of the variables in the questionnaire and see how they impacted SPRF in different countries. For instance, some investigated the impact of citizenship on religious freedom, others of religiosity, and others of legal pluralism.

Personal characteristics, such as the personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, and theoretical, political, and ideological stances of each participant greatly influenced these choices and the form of individual researcher's aims and questions. In our case, the longstanding interest in the institutional relationships between religion and politics, as well as the societal interplay among political orientations, religious identity, and human rights, led us to focus on religious freedom and socio-political variables, understood as both normative perceptions of politics and religion and personal religious and political identities.

4.3.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire *Religion and Citizenship* (Appendix-A) is a theory-driven structured questionnaire that reflects the theoretical assumptions developed in the context of SPRF theory. It covers various key areas of religious freedom, society, human rights, culture, and politics. It is divided into four main parts:

1. 'About you': In this section, questions are asked about sex, age, religious affiliation, parents' education, political orientation, family income, religious and political participation, and level of identification with national culture.

2. 'About religious freedom': Here, the five dimensions of SPRF are operationalised and turned into measurable variables and indicators. Questions concern personal meanings of religious freedom as a multi-dimensional concept and their relationship with society, personal fulfilment, democracy, and diversity. One question regards attitudes toward the rights of women, LGBT people, refugees, and older adults.

3. 'About religion': This section asks questions on religiosity, spirituality, believing in God, and families' religious traditions.

4. 'About society': This section includes questions on the societal role of religion, State-religion relations, secularism, attitudes towards religious diversity and democracy, and two questions about participants' attitudes towards citizenship.

While in the first part of the questionnaire, variables of interest are measured with socio-demographic questions (e.g., sex, level of education) or rating scales (e.g., political orientation or identification with national culture), in the second, third, and fourth parts, they are all measured with five-point Likert scales (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = not certain, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly)[17].

Questionnaire design phases

The first draft of the questionnaire was developed by Olga Breskaya and Giuseppe Giordan in 2018 and tested with a sample of 1,035 Italian students at the University of Padua (Breskaya & Giordan, 2019). After this step, the project assumed a cross-national orientation, initiating a new phase in the design of the questionnaire. One of the main challenges of cross-national survey research is to reach comparability or equivalence of the constructs (Harkness, 2008). To achieve this goal, Kuechler (1987) suggested that 'conceptualisation and questionnaire development should be a team effort. For each nation, the research team should include at least one scholar with intimate knowledge of this nation [...] Ideally, each nation should be represented by at least one researcher native to this country and still residing there' (Kuechler,

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[17] In all the questionnaire had 178 Likert items, divided into 22 Likert scales representing different variables (for the difference see Brown, 2011).

1987, p. 237). Therefore, in November 2019, a new version of the questionnaire (in English) started to be developed by our team of researchers based at the Human Rights Centre of the University of Padua and involving Ph.D. students, senior researchers, and professors from different parts of Europe and the world (Italy, Croatia, Uruguay, Poland, and France). The goal was to introduce the new citizenship variable and discuss how to adapt the questions to different national and cultural environments.

Pretest

To improve the validity of the survey (Willis, 2016), the questionnaire was pretested using pre-field and on-field pre-testing methods (Scheuren, 2004).

After implementing the questionnaire with variables on citizenship, first, a pre-field *panel of five experts* (mostly sociologists with experience in survey methodology) was organised to discuss and identify the major issues regarding contents and administration methods (see Campanelli, 2007, p.183). Second, thanks to the support of the Italian foundation 'Intercultura', between March and April 2021, a *pilot study* with 400 young people (19-23 years) was conducted (the results are reported in Breskaya et al., 2021). In this case, data were collected by telephone interviews. Third, this experience was followed by three *interviewer debriefing* sessions (Campanelli et al., 1991), in which, before drafting the final version of the questionnaire, the problems found after interacting with respondents were discussed (e.g., problems with the wording of specific questions, categories that did not work correctly, etc.).

Translation of the questionnaire: from English to Italian and Croatian

In a cross-national survey, questionnaire translation is a crucial step. Indeed, its quality impacts data comparability and affects the interpretive equivalence of questions across different nations and cultures (see Johnson, 1998). For the translation from English to Italian and Croatian, we opted for a *team translation approach*[18] (Harkness, 2007, p.77). The original version of the questionnaire was in English. An Italian team of three researchers translated it into Italian, while a Croatian team of two translated it into Croatian.

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[18] For the discussion of other methods see Behr and Shishido (2016), Harkness (2007), Johnson (1998).

4.3.3 Sampling

For this research project, a convenience sample was used. It comprised bachelor's and master's students enrolled at the University of Zagreb and Padua between September 2021 and January 2022 (the data collection period).

Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where members of the population are included in the study based on practical criteria such as geographical proximity, availability, willingness to participate, and easy accessibility of the subjects for the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016). In quantitative research, the ideal should be to use probability sampling techniques since they are more reliable and allow researchers to make inferences about the entire population. However, in social sciences, non-probability samples are widely used for reasons of time and cost, primarily by Ph.D. students and early career researchers. We profited from our academic contacts at both the Universities of Padua and Zagreb to contact potential participants.

4.3.4 Data collection methods and recruitment of participants

Between September 2021 and January 2022, 1,317 questionnaires were collected, of which 714 were in Italy and 603 were in Croatia. The original idea was to collect all the questionnaires using the paper-and-pencil method, by going personally to previously selected classes at the University of Padua and Zagreb during their lesson hours. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic lasted longer than we expected and all university classes were online only until winter 2021 (the beginning of the third Ph.D. year) in both Italy and Croatia, in order to have the data in time, it was necessary to turn to a mixed-mode study (see de Leeuw et al., 2007). In Italy, 168 questionnaires were collected through telephone interviews and 546 through the paper-and-pencil method; in Croatia, all the data were collected by submitting an online survey (see Tab.4.1). In all three cases, the questionnaire was the same as described in the paragraph above. It took around 45 minutes to complete, and no incentives were provided for participation.

Tab. 4.1

Number of questionnaires collected by mode of data collection

Methods	Italy	Croatia
Telephone Interviews	168	0
Paper-and-Pencil	546	0
Online survey	0	603
Total	714	603

Telephone interviews

We started the telephone interviews in September 2021, when we still did not know whether in-person lessons would start again at the University of Padua. To recruit participants, we sent an invitation email to three lists of students (see Appendix-B).

The issue of response rates in survey methodology is crucial. The survey research theory distinguishes between *unit nonresponse* and *item nonresponse* (or *item missing data*). The former refers to the failure to obtain any information from the eligible members of a sample due to noncontact or refusal; the latter refers to the failure to obtain a response to one or more questions when the others are completed (Hox et al., 2007, p. 10).

In our case, while *item non-responses* were null, there was a high rate of *unit non-response*. We contacted 1736 students by email, but only 168 agreed to participate in the survey.

Reasons for *unit non-response* may vary. They may relate to failure to locate a sample unit because the contact information is wrong, the inability of the sample unit to participate due to unforeseen causes, language barriers between the interviewer and the sample unit, or even loss of data after it has been collected. However, it is the refusals that constitute a large part of the non-responses. These may depend on the interviewer's appearance and ability to communicate the research topic, but it is often the burden involved in taking part in a survey that leads potential respondents to decline the invitation. Often, this burden is evaluated in terms of time, other times based on cognitive effort, risk or sensitivity. Moreover, the choice of participation

is often based on a cost-benefit calculation by the respondent[19]. Finally, the mode of data collection also plays a role: research has shown that telephone interviews have a much lower response rate than face-to-face or email interviews (Groves, 1990).

In the case of the present research, we hypothesised that, in this phase, the high rate of non-response might have depended on the scarce use of email by young students (Saleh & Bista, 2017) and on their unwillingness to assume the burden of taking part in the survey, negatively evaluated in terms of time and cognitive effort, considered more burdensome as it was exam period and the beginning of the new academic year[20].

Paper-pencil method

Although the paper-and-pencil mode is expensive and time-consuming, it is still considered one of the most reliable methods for collecting data surveys. Different studies have shown no relevant differences between computer and paper-and-pencil research in terms of the reliability of responses. However, although online surveys are consistently less expensive, paper-and-pencil, in some cases, presents some advantages that potentially affect the overall outcome of a study. Indeed, the presence of a researcher diminishes item nonresponses, as the presence of a researcher makes it possible to clarify unclear questions by preventing them from being abandoned or answered at random, and avoids the risk of the research not being taken seriously by the participants (Wood et al., 2006) This was the reason why we initially planned to collect all the data using this mode.

However, after the spread of Covid-19, with this method we were able to collect 514 questionnaires in Italy between October and November 2021, when the University of Padua's in-person courses started again. To submit the questionnaire, we went personally to four classes during their class hours. The research involved Bachelor's and Master's students of literature, international relations, and cinema programmes. They were selected based on their professors' availability to host the survey. Participation in the survey was free and anonymous, and all the students were informed that they could refuse to participate in the research. All the students decided to participate.

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[19] This part about nonresponse causes was taken by Lynn (2007).

[20] We were aware of these potential obstacles, but as mentioned above, the pandemic resulted in a number of constraints, to which moment by moment we tried to respond as optimally as possible.

Finally, in Croatia, data were collected using an online survey. The questionnaire was uploaded to the program 'Lime Survey'. All the questionnaires were completed during class hours at the University of Zagreb. We logged on to Zoom to present the questionnaire and then stayed logged on until the end should there be any questions or requests for clarification. In this case, too, participation was free and anonymous. A total of 823 students participated in the online survey. Of these questionnaires, however, only 603 were included in the analysis. We decided to eliminate the remaining 220 because they had either opened the link but had not answered any questions, had only answered the socio-demographic questions, or had not answered the questions on religious freedom.

4.4 Description of the variables and development of scales procedures

This section describes how the variables were measured in this study. To help ensure the survey's validity, some of the items were adopted from measures that had been used in previous studies. Multiple-item scales were employed.

4.4.1 Control variables

Sex – Sex was included as a control variable since studies reveal that women support human rights more than men (for a bibliographic overview, see Sheka and Pederson, 2013). It was represented by a binary variable (male and female). Respondents were asked to answer the question, 'What is your sex?'[21].

Religious affiliation – We included this variable in the control group since there is evidence that it might be correlated to religious freedom perceptions (e.g. Breskaya and Botvar, 2019), secularism (e.g., Hinki et al., 2014) and human rights (e.g. Francis et al., 2020).
Respondents were asked to answer the question, 'What is your religion?'. A categorical variable with ten values measured religious affiliation: 1) No religion, 2) Roman-Catholic, 3) Protestant, 4) Christian-Orthodox, 5) Pentecostal, 6) Other Christian tradition, 7) Muslim, 8)

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[21] During the telephone interviews and the administration of the questionnaires in the classrooms, we recorded more criticism of the choice to include only two genders. In our case, as the issue of gender identity is not central to our research, this finding may be inconsequential from the point of view of analysis. However, the criticism confirms that for young people, especially educated ones, the issue of gender identity is a serious and important topic and therefore it is suggested that the modalities of the variable be expanded in further research.

Jewish, 9) Buddhist, 10) Hindu, 11) Sikh, 12) Other. As the number of members of most minority religious groups was very small in both samples, we decided to use a reduced version of the variable for the inferential analysis, summarising the multiple groups into three: 1) No Religion, 2) Catholics, and 3) Others.

Political orientation – Political orientation referred to respondents' political beliefs and was represented by the left-right political spectrum. It was decided to include it among the four control variables based on empirical studies showing that political orientation might be a key variable for understanding attitudes towards both secularism (e.g. Beard, 2013; Campbell et al.2020; Layman, 2016; Campbell et al., 2018) and human rights (e.g. Cohrs et al. 2007; Hertel et al., 2009; McFarland & Mathews, 2005).

To verify the respondents' political orientations, a 10-point scale was used, with 1 measuring extreme Left and 10 measuring extreme Right political views. The left-right spectrum is a common tool in survey research. However, there is still no agreement on the most appropriate scale to measure political orientation. Although the 10-point scale is one of the most used scales and produces relatively reliable results, it has flaws. According to Deutsch et al. (1966), the lack of a midpoint increases the non-responses and leads respondents with a low political sophistication to use point 5 to express their latent orientation (Deutsch et al. 1966, in Kroh, 2007, p.207). We took into account these concerns while commenting on the results (see ch. 6). In this case, too, for multivariate and inferential analyses, we recoded the variable and summarised the responses into three categories: left (points 1 to 4), centre (points 5 and 6), and right (points 7 to 10).

Political engagement – According to Sheka and Pederson (2013), when dealing with the relationship between politics and human rights it is not sufficient to analyse ideological positioning alone, but it is also necessary to look also at commitment and behaviour. Therefore, the variable *political engagement* referred to different dimensions of political involvement, in order to give more perspective to the political component of the analysis and assess its effect on the perception of religious freedom. The scale was formed by three items and had already been tested by Breskaya et al. (2020). The first item was about political information ('How often do you follow politics in the media?'). It was measured by a 5-point scale measuring frequency (1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = at least once a month, 4 = at least once a week, 5 = nearly every day). The other two concerned, respectively, political activity ('I am included in

Italian/Croatian political life') and political interest ('I am interested in politics'). Both were measured with a 5-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

It was decided to control political commitment since previous studies suggested that political orientation might condition human rights support, and different levels of political activity might correlate to secularist attitudes (Campbell et al., 2018) and religious freedom perceptions (Breskaya et al., 2021).

Religiosity – For religiosity as well, previous empirical studies showed its potential impact on religious freedom (e.g. Breskaya & Botvar, 2019; Francis et al., 2020) and human rights (e.g. Moghaddam & Vuksnaovic, 1990; Ok & Eren, 2013).

The scale measuring religiosity had already been validated in the previous work of Francis et al. (2020). It was a multi-item scale composed of three items. Two concerned the attendance of religious rites ('How often do you attend a religious worship service? ') and the frequency of solitary prayer ('How often do you pray in your home or by yourself ?'). Both were measured by a 6-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = at least once a month, 5 = nearly every week, 6 = several times a week). The third regarded believing in God. It was an item (I believe in God) answering the question 'Do you agree with the following definitions about you ?'. It was measured by a 5-point Likert scale going from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

4.4.2 Independent variables

In the article *Social Perception of Religious Freedom: Testing the Impact of Secularism and State-religion Relations*, following Kuru's theory on secularism (see Ch.2, par.2.4), Breskaya et al. (2021b) used two items from the *Religion and Citizenship* questionnaire as indicators of the two concepts of 'passive' (item 1) and 'assertive' (item 2) secularism:

1. State should be neutral, treat all religions equally, and allow them to be present in the public sphere (passive secularism)
2. State should be neutral, treat all religions equally, and confine religious expression to the private sphere (assertive secularism)

Both items replied to the question, 'How much do you agree with the following statements about relations between state, society, and religion in Italy?' Moreover, still in the same article,

the authors used the following three items as indicators of the variable 'Church-State relations':

1. Endorsed Special legal status of Catholicism and close ties between Catholicism, politics, and culture (model of endorsed Catholic Church)
2. State should have a preferred set of religions and recognise the special role of them in cultural and historical tradition (model of endorsed religion)
3. It is better if state controls religion and does not allow it to be present in public sphere (model of control over religion)

However, our idea of secularism and establishment emphasised both the social dimension of the three constructs and their ideological component, holding together in each of the three concepts normative positions on the relationship between state and religion and on the role of religion in society. Based on these theoretical assumptions, after developing the instrument within this Ph.D. project and adding some items, we used these items as indicators of the variables as we had conceptualised them.

For *institutional secularism,* we identified three options[22]:

1. State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and allow them to be present in the public sphere
2. The state should be legally separated from all religions but support religious pluralism and participation of various religions in political and cultural spheres
3. The right to have one's 'difference' (minority religiosity, ethnicity, etc.) should be recognised and supported in the public and private sphere[23]

For *ideological secularis*m, we offered three possible positions:

1. State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and confine all religious expressions in the private sphere

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[22] These three items as well as the first three under *ideological secularism* referred to the question: 'How much do you agree with the following statements about relations between state, society, and religion in Italy?'

[23] In Breskaya and Giordan (2019), this item was considered an indicator of "multicultural citizenship" (as conceptualised by Modood and Kastoryano, 2007).

2. It is better if State controls religions and does not allow it to be present in the public sphere

3. We should tolerate differences in private sphere but assimilate "different culture or religion" to major/dominant culture[24]

For *establishment*:

1. State should guarantee special legal status of Catholicism and support close ties between Catholicism, politics, and culture

2. State should guarantee special legal status of a preferred set of religions and recognize special role of them in cultural and political sphere

3. The Catholic Church as part of Italian identity should be favored in society[25]

On these items, we performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

<u>Factor analysis</u>

Factor analysis is an instrument used to develop scales, tests, and measures. It allows for establishing dimensions of latent constructs and provides evidence to confirm previously formulated theories. Before extracting the factors, two tests must be performed to assess the factorability of the data set. These tests include the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. According to William et al. (2010), the KMO's index ranges from 0 to 1, with 0.5 considered suitable for the analysis, whereas Bartlett's Test should be significant ($p<.05$) in order to perform the analysis (see also Harrington, 2009; Pallant, 2016).

In our case, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy has a value of 0.7, which is considered acceptable, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found statistically significant ($p <. 001$). We thus concluded that the model was 'working' and that it successfully identified the underlying latent factors.

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[24] The same as note 23.

[25] This item referred to the question: 'How much do you agree with the following statements related to the current situation with Religious Freedom in Italy/Croatia?'. The other two answered the question: 'How much do you agree with the following statements about relations between state, society, and religion in Italy?'

Applying principal components analysis (PCA) and varimax rotation, we found three factors with 67.2 % of total variance explained[26] (Tab.4.2). According to our theoretical intent, we labelled the three obtained factors, 'Institutional secularism' (Factor 1), 'Ideological secularism' (Factor 2), and 'Establishment' (Factor 3).

In the analysis, factor loadings below 0.32 were cut-off, while the number of factors to retain was based on the visual inspection of a scree plot (Morrison, 2009). Moreover, we decided to drop the cross-loading item ' We should tolerate differences in the private sphere but assimilate different cultures or religions into major/ dominant culture'. Its communality was lower than the threshold of 0.4 and its correlation with both Factor1 and Factor2 makes difficult its interpretation (see Yong and Pearce, 2013: 84).

Factor 1 consists of three items, referring to religion and State separation, and respect for pluralism, with religions participating in politics and society. The item communalities respectively measure .74 for the item 'State should be legally separated from religion, but support pluralism and participation of religion in the public sphere', .76 for 'State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and allow them to be present in the public sphere', and .68 for the question 'The right to have one's "difference" should be recognised and supported in the public and the private spheres'.

Factor 2, by contrast, counted two items. Their common core content addresses a model of managing religion that considers it a private matter deserving to be tamed and confined to the private sphere. In this case, the first item's loading ('State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and confine religious expression to the private sphere') measured .87 and the second ('It is better if State controls religion and does not allow it to be present in public sphere') .66.

Finally, Factor 3 consisted of three items that refer to a religion-State-society pattern privileging Catholicism or a restricted group of religions. Its items' communalities all measured above .7. The measured communality was .91 for 'The state should guarantee the special legal status of Catholicism', .85 for the item 'The state should guarantee the special legal status of a preferred set of religions', and .79 for the item 'Catholic Church should be favoured in society'.

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[26]There is no agreement on the cumulative percentage of variance (CPV) that should be considered optimal in the EFA (Taherdoost et al., 2020). According to Hair et al. (1995), it varies according to the diverse research areas in which the analysis is applied: whereas in the natural sciences, it is suggested to stop the rotation at 95%; in humanities, even 50%-60% is considered acceptable (Hair et al. 1995, in Taherdoost et al., 2014, p.378; see also Pett et al., 2003).

Moreover, they are weakly correlated with the other factors, further confirming that they are good indicators of the variable (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

Tab. 4.2

Rotated Component Matrix[a] (independent variables)

Questions	Component		
	1	2	3
The State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and allow them to be present in the public sphere.		.76	
The state should be legally separated from all religions but support religious pluralism and participation of various religions in political and cultural spheres		.74	
The right to have one's 'difference' (minority religiosity, ethnicity, etc.) should be recognized and supported in the public and private sphere		.68	
The State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and confine all religious expressions in the private sphere			.87
It is better if the State controls religions and does not allow them to be present in the public sphere			.66
The State should guarantee special legal status of Catholicism and support close ties between Catholicism, politics, and culture	.91		
The State should guarantee a special legal status of a preferred set of religions and recognize special role of them in cultural and political sphere	.85		
The Catholic Church as part of Italian identity should be favored in society	.79		

Notes. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a] Factor loadings below .32 were cut-off.

4.4.3 Dependent variables

In their pilot study on SPRF, Breskaya and Giordan (2019) performed an EFA on a vast group of items from the second section of the questionnaire *Religion and Citizenship* and extracted ten latent factors. According to them, this result confirmed the multidimensional nature of religious freedom as a concept and the five dimensions of religious freedom they had hypothesised from a theoretical perspective[27].

Bearing in mind the multidimensional nature of religious freedom, in this work, we have decided to focus on only three of its dimensions, of which we have selected some aspects. Based on our formulation of the concepts of secularism and establishment—which emphasise both the diversity of views on religious pluralism and the public/private normative distinction of religious experience—it seemed to us that the aspects of religious freedom on which it was most interesting to measure their impact were: religious freedom as a societal value, that is, the importance of religious freedom in guaranteeing equality and peace between majority and minority religions and between religions and non-religious people; religious freedom as an individual value, namely understanding religious freedom as a private right; and finally, its conception religious freedom as the right to express the belief publicly. The latter, in particular, is a central point since, as we have seen, the two forms of secularism are distinguished precisely by whether or not they support religion as a participant in the public sphere.

For every dimension, we have selected a number of indicators, yet differentiated our selections from those made in the original SPRF model. For ʻreligious freedom as a societal valueʼ:

1. Freedom to choose my religious/non-religious identity
2. Non-discrimination for religious minorities on the basis of religion
3. Equality of various religions in society before the law
4. Non-violent co-existence for all religions in every society

For ʻreligious freedom as an individual valueʼ[28]:

1. It is connected with the idea of human dignity

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[27] To recall, the five dimensions were: 1) religious freedom as individual and religious groups' value, 2) religious freedom as societal value, 3) religious freedom as a principle of state-religion governance, 4) religious freedom as human rights standard, 5) societal impact of judicialisation of religious freedom.
[28] This scale was already validated in Giordan et al. (2022).

2. It is connected with the search for individual truth

3. It allows everyone to pursue their personal spiritual fulfilment

For 'religious freedom as freedom to express religion in public', we chose four items:

1. Freedom to write, issue and disseminate religious publications

2. Freedom to express religious views in the media

3. Freedom to wear religious clothes/symbols in public places

4. Freedom to worship

As in the case of the independent variables, we performed an EFA for two reasons: to confirm that the multidimensional model was also working with our sample and to assess whether our model's three dimensions were well represented.

In our case, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy has a value of .8, which is considered acceptable, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was found statistically significant (p < .001).

Applying principal components analysis (PCA) and varimax rotation, we find three factors with 64% of the total variance explained[29] (Tab.4.3). We labelled the three obtained factors: 'Rf as a societal value' (Factor 1), 'Rf as individual value' (Factor 2), and 'Rf as freedom to express religion' (Factor 3).

Factor 1 consisted of four items, whose communalities measured all above .7. The measured communality was .77 for 'Freedom to choose my religious/non-religious identity', .84 for the item 'Non-discrimination for religious minorities on the basis of religion', .79 for the item 'Equality of various religions in society before the law', and .77 for 'Non-violent co-existence for all religions in every society'.

Factor 2, by contrast, consists of three items that respectively measured .78 for the item 'It is connected with the idea of human dignity', .85 for 'It is connected with the search for individual truth', and .78 for the question 'It allows everyone to pursue their personal spiritual fulfilment'. Finally, Factor 3 counted three items. In this case the first items' loading ('Freedom to write, issue and disseminate religious publications') measured .8, the second ('Freedom to express

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[29] In the analysis, factor loadings below .32 were cut off.

religious views in the media') .75, and the third ('Freedom to wear religious clothes/symbols in public places') .81.

Tab. 4.3

Rotated Component Matrix[a] (dependent variables)

Questions	Component		
	1	2	3
Freedom to choose my religious/non-religious identity	.77		
Non-discrimination for religious minorities on the basis of religion	.84		
Equality of various religions in society before the law	.79		
Non-violent co-existence for all religions in every society	.77		
It is connected with the idea of human dignity		.78	
It is connected with the search for individual truth		.85	
It allows everyone to pursue their personal spiritual fulfilment		.78	
Freedom to express religious views in the media			.80
Freedom to wear religious clothes/symbols in public places			.75
Freedom to write, issue and disseminate religious publications			.81

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a] Factor loadings below .32 were cut-off.

We decided to drop the cross-loading item ' Freedom to worship' as its correlation with both Factor 1 and Factor 2 makes its interpretation difficult (see Yong and Pearce, 2013, p. 84).

4.5 Reliability analysis

In statistics, several tests are performed to estimate reliability in quantitative research. Among them, Cronbach's alpha is the most commonly used. It provides a measure of the *internal*

consistency of a test or a scale, that is, the interrelatedness of a sample of test items (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011, p. 53). Internal consistency is not a measure of the unidimensionality of a scale. Nevertheless, if performed after a factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha can be used to confirm whether or not a scale is also unidimensional, that is, if all the items measure the same single latent trait or construct (Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges between 0 and 1. The closer the result is to 1, the more the items in the scale are considered internally consistent. Following these criteria, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the scales present in our conceptual model.

Political engagement and religiosity

In the case of control variables, Cronbach's alpha for the 3 items of *religiosity* and *political engagement* were respectively .82 and .79 (Tab.4.4). It therefore showed good reliability for both scales.

Tab. 4.4

Reliability of control variables

Scales	N	No.Items	Cronbach's alpha
Religiosity	1158	3	.82
Political Engagement	1242	3	.79

Institutional secularism, ideological secularism, and establishment

It is suggested to use Cronbach's alpha with at least three items, while for two-item scales, the Spearman-Brown formula is considered preferable and less unbiased (Esinga et al., 2013). Thus, in the case of independent variables, while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was measured for the 3-item scale of *institutional secularism* and *establishment*, Spearman-Brown was calculated for the 2-item *ideological secularism* (Tab.4.5).

Tab. 4.5

Reliability of the independent variables

Scales	N	No.Items	Cronbach's alpha	Spearman-Brown
Institutional Secularism	1186	3	.63	
Establishment	1190	3	.84	
Ideological secularism		2		.23[*]

Notes: [*]*p<.05*

Cronbach's alpha for the *institutional secularism* scale obtained a value of .63. Even though the threshold to consider scale reliability very good is Cronbach's alpha > .70, according to Pallant (2016), a value above .6 also may be considered acceptable and indicates a moderate level of reliability. In the case of *establishment*, by contrast, Cronbach's alpha measured .84, thus indicating very good reliability of the scale.

Spearman-Brown's coefficient was calculated for the two items of *ideological secularism.* A statistically significant positive correlation was found between the two variables, r (1185) = .23, *p* = .01. We are aware that, as a general guide, factors with two or fewer variables must be interpreted with caution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Moreover, we also acknowledge that the correlation between the two items is not considered ideal as not strong enough (Yong & Pearce, 2013, p. 80). However, to overcome these problems, we in part rely on the results of the EFA that showed the unidimensionality of the scale, namely its quality to measure a single theoretical construct. Moreover, to further verify the attainability of the scale, we also performed two distinct regression models for each of our dependent variables, one using the factor as a whole and the other using the two items separately. The results of these further calculations show that: 1) there is coherence between the statistical significance of the factor

and that of the individual items; and 2) the item 'It is better if the State controls religion' has a higher weight in the factor. These results led us to retain the variable and to include it in the analysis with the others, although we always remained aware that its results needed to be interpreted with careful consideration.

The three dimensions of religious freedom

Cronbach's alpha was calculated also for the 4 items of *Rf as a societal value* (a=.82), and for the 3 items of *Rf as freedom to express religion* (a=.75) and *Rf as individual value* (a=.75), obtaining good results (Tab.4.6).

Tab. 4.6

Reliability of dependent variables

Scales	N	No.Items	Cronbach's alpha
Rf as a societal value	1309	4	.82
Rf as individual value	1306	3	.75
Rf as freedom to express rel.	1307	3	.75

4.6 Multicollinearity

In a quantitative study that foresees regression analysis, such as the present one, one of the most severe dangers is multicollinearity between variables. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables in the regression model are highly correlated (Daoud, 2017) and predictor variables that are highly correlated allow little independent explanatory ability (Franke, 2010). One way to check for multicollinearity is to use a metric called "variance inflation factor" (VIF), which measures the correlation and strength of correlation between the predictor variables in a regression model. To determine whether multicollinearity existed, VIF coefficients for each of the predictor variables for each of the religious freedom dependent variables were produced. A value of VIF greater than 5 indicates a severe correlation between two or more predictor variables in the regression models. All obtained values measured higher

than 1 but lower than 2 (Tab.4.7). Values between 1 and 5 indicate a moderate correlation between predictor variables, but not strong enough to deserve attention (Franke, 2010).

Tab. 4.7

VIF coefficients for independent variables

	VIF		
	Rf societal value	Rf indiv. value	Rf fr. expr. relig.
Inst. Secul.	1.08	1.08	1.08
Id. Secul.	1.09	1.09	1.08
Establishment	1.52	1.52	1.53

Notes. Inst. Secul = Institutional Secularism; Id. Secul. = Ideological Secularism; Rf indiv. value = Rf individual value; Rf freed.to expr. relig. = Rf freedom to express religion.

4.7 Data analysis techniques

This study aimed to assess the impact of different attitudes towards religion/State/society relations on the production of different meanings of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia. The independent variables were *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*. The dependent variables were three dimensions of religious freedom: *Rf as a societal value*, *Rf as individual value*, and *Rf as freedom to express religion*.

To reach its general aim, this thesis set four objectives: 1) to compare social perceptions of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia; 2) to compare the social perceptions of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* in Italy and Croatia; 3) to find out the effects of religious and political identities on the perceptions of *institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*; and 4) to test the impacts of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* on the three dimensions (societal, individual, practices) of religious freedom.

To achieve these objectives, 13 hypotheses were formulated (Appendix-C) and both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied. The data were analysed with the SPSS software v. 27. To analyse them, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used. Descriptive statistics are the numerical and graphical procedures that summarise and describe the characteristics of a data set (Fisher & Marshall, 2009), comprising various techniques (for

an overview, see Nick, 2007). Descriptive statistics represent the basis of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and is usually the step that precedes inferential statistical operations. By contrast, inferential statistics is a 'decision-making process' as 'it attempts to isolate the decision maker from his personal opinion and preference to achieve an objective conclusion that is supported by the data' (Tu, 2007). It includes a set of techniques, based on probability theory, which makes it possible to verify whether or not one can assess the evidence provided by the data in favour of some claim about the population parameters (Moore & McCabe, 2009). Statistical inference's main goals consist of estimating the parameters of a population and verifying statistical hypotheses. The main features of the statistical techniques performed and the reasons why they were used are outlined below.

Description of the sample and comparison of groups

Absolute and *relative frequencies*, *means,* and *standard deviations* were calculated to describe the socio-demographic characteristic of the data. Qualitative variables were described through *absolute frequencies* and *proportions* for each category (%). Quantitative variables, instead, were described by *mean* and *standard deviation*.

As we have seen, many of this study's variables are Likert items and scales. There is a huge debate in methodological literature about whether Likert scales should be treated as ordinal or interval scales. Following Brown (2011), it was decided to consider both Likert items and Likert scales as interval variables, thus applying to them descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations.

Moreover, given the comparative nature of the project, Italian and Croatian respondents were compared with regard to the four control variables (*religious affiliation*, *political orientation*, *religiosity* and *political orientation*). First, it was verified whether the proportion of the Italian and Croatian respondents differed or was the same in each category of the two categorical variables of *religious affiliation* and *political orientation*, by performing the *chi-square* (χ^2) test (Snedecor & Coachran, 1980). Second, it was assessed whether there were differences between Italians and Croatians concerning the two variables of *religiosity* and *political engagement*. However, since the latter were continuous variables, instead of the *chi-square*, two *t-tests* were performed (Pallant, 2016). There are two types of *t-tests*: paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests. The former's goal is to evaluate changes in scores for participants tested in two different periods of time. The latter, by contrast, is used to compare the scores performed by two different groups of people (Pallant, 2016). The second one was calculated.

As for the other parametric tests, two of the most important basic assumptions for performing the t-test is that the quantitative variable is approximately normally distributed in both groups and that there are no outliers in either group. In this case, from the normality tests (Shapiro-Wilk) and box plots analysis it emerged that the distribution of the two variables (*religiosity* and *political engagement*) was not normally distributed in both groups. However, it was still decided to apply the t-test instead of a nonparametric test based on the Central Limit Theorem (CLT), stating that if the groups have sufficiently large numerosity (n>25), are not too different from each other in terms of numerosity, and there are no outliers, then the distribution of the averages may be considered to be normal even if the distribution of the source variable is not (Moore & McCabe, 2009, p. 476).

First objective

The first objective was to comparatively explore SPRF among Italian and Croatian respondents. The aim was to assess whether there were significant differences between Italian and Croatian participant students in their support of the three dimensions of religious freedom. To achieve this goal, different steps were followed. First, descriptive statistics techniques were used to see how participants perceived the individual items of each of the three measurement scales (*Rf as a societal value*, *Rf as an individual value*, *Rf as freedom to express religion*). For every item, percentages of agreement and disagreement, means, and standard deviations of each group of participants (Italians and Croatians) were reported.

Second, the average means and standard deviations of the three measurement scales were calculated.

Third, three *student t-tests* were performed to explore whether there was any significant difference in the religious freedom (three dimensions) scores for Italian and Croatian respondents. In this case, the CLT was also applied.

Second objective

The second objective was to compare the social perceptions of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* among Italian and Croatian participant university students. The same procedures adopted for the first objective were followed. Therefore, first, percentages, means, and standard deviations of every item of the three scales (*institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*) were calculated for both groups (Italian and Croatian). Second, the average means and standard deviations of the three measurement scales

were reported. Third, three t-tests for independent samples were performed to compare the scores of the two groups on the three variables.

Third objective

The third objective was to assess the impact of religious and political identities on the perceptions of *institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*.

First, the average scores of the three religious (No religion, Catholics, Others) and political groups (left, centre, and right) (separately) on the three variables were calculated.

Second, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. One-way ANOVA is a parametric test that compares the means of two or more groups for one dependent variable. It replaces the t-test when the study includes more than two groups (Ross et al., 2017). It is also called 'analysis of variance' because 'it compares the variance (variability in scores) *between* the different groups (believed to be due to the independent variable) with the variability *within* each of the groups (believed to be due to chance)' (Pallant, 2016, p.255). To perform one-way ANOVA a minimum sample size of 30 units is recommended, but an equal number between groups is not (Ross & Wilson, 2017). Moreover, one-way ANOVA requires one categorical independent variable, with two or more categories, and one dependent continuous variable. In our case, categorical independent variables were respectively religious identities (No religion, Catholics, and Others) and political orientations (left, centre, and right). By contrast, the dependent continuous variables were *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment,* each of them analysed separately.

As with the t-test, before conducting ANOVA, some basic assumptions must be fulfilled. First of all, data should be normally or near-to-normally distributed for each group. From Shapiro-Wilk's test, it emerged that the distribution of the three dependent variables in the various religious and political groups did not always overlap with a normal distribution. However, here, unlike in the case of the t-test, where the CLT was applied, it was decided to use both parametric tests (ANOVA) and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis) to assess the statistical significance of the observations (Field & Wilcox, 2007). Indeed, the robustness that applies to methods that test means (as the t-test is) does not apply to methods that test variances (such as the F-statistic of the ANOVA), which are considered not to be as robust with respect to large violations in normality (see Whitlock & Schluter, 2014).

Homoscedasticity is the second formal requirement to respect before performing ANOVA. It means that the different groups to compare have equal or similar variances. To assess it, Levene's Test for homogeneity of variances was performed. It tests whether or not the variance

score is the same for each group (Pallant, 2016). When Levene's Test gave statistically significant results (<.05), showing that the variances were heterogeneous, Fisher's one-way ANOVA was calculated; when it was not significant (>.05), Welch's ANOVA test was applied (Pallant, 2016).

One-way ANOVA is an omnibus test that says whether there is a statistically significant difference between groups, but not which of the groups differ. Post-hoc comparisons, using the Games-Howell post hoc procedure (in the case of heterogeneous variances between groups and Welch's test) or Tukey's procedure (in the case of homogeneous variance and Fisher's test), were conducted to determine which pair means differed significantly (Pallant, 2016).

Fourth objective

The last—and most important—objective was to test the impacts of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* on the three dimensions (societal, individual, and freedom to express religion) of religious freedom.

First, we decided to calculate Pearson's correlation coefficients for our independent and dependent variables. Correlation analysis refers to the degree of relationship between variables: it assesses the strength and the direction of the relationships between two pairs of variables. Correlation may be calculated with two methods: diagrammatic and mathematical. Karl Pearson's coefficient (*r*) is part of the second mode and it is the technique applied in the presence of quantitative variables (Kafle, 2019). However, the presence of correlation does not necessarily mean causation. Therefore, in order to evaluate the influence of the three independent variables (*institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*) on the three dimensions of religious freedom (*Rf as societal value*, *Rf as individual value*, *Rf as freedom to express religion*), for both samples, the three general hierarchical linear general regression models (LGM) were constructed with robust estimates of the standard errors, in order to limit the heteroskedasticity of the residuals due to the negative asymmetry in the constructs.

Hierarchical regression analyses the effect of a predictor variable after controlling for other variables. This 'control' is 'achieved by calculating the change in the adjusted R2 at each step of the analysis, thus accounting for the increment in variance after each variable (or group of variables) is entered into the regression model' (Lewis, 2007, pp. 10-11). As hierarchical models are appropriate tools when variance on a variable is explained by predictor variables that are correlated, they are quite useful in social sciences where variables are often correlated with each other (Lewis, 2007). In our case, each of these models explored, in the first block,

the relationship existing between the control variables and the three constructs relating to religious freedom and, in the second block, the effect of also including the independent variables as regressors.

LGMs are mathematically identical to multiple regression analysis, yet they allow the accommodation of both quantitative and qualitative variables. The term 'univariate' does not refer to the number of independent variables, but of dependent ones. For all inferential analyses, the significance level was set at alpha =.05.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the research design and methodologies used to answer the research problem and achieve the research objectives.

Firstly, we have shown how, in methodological terms, the present research fits into a strand of studies creating a kind of empirical tradition in sociological and political research on religious freedom.

Then, we explained why the theory and methods of the social perception of religious freedom (SPRF), with its social constructionist and quantitative approach, became the methodological framework of this thesis.

Third, after describing the fundamentals of survey research and the specific challenges of cross-national projects, we explained how we approached all the various steps, from sample formation to data collection.

Fourth, we described the variables of our conceptual model and illustrated the procedures we used to construct our measurement scales, also reporting their reliability and verifying the absence of multicollinearity.

Finally, we explained the statistical techniques used to achieve each research objective. In the next chapter, the results of the analysis will be presented.

Chapter 5

Religious Freedom and Political Secularism in Italy and Croatia: Empirical Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a descriptive and inferential statistical analysis aimed at exploring the relationship among the various control and independent variables presented in the previous chapter and their effects on the outcome variables.

To briefly summarize, the research aimed to assess whether different normative conceptions of religion and politics affect the social perceptions of religious freedom. It had four main objectives:

- To explore comparatively the social perceptions of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia;
- To explore comparatively the social perception of institutional secularism, ideological secularism, and establishment in Italy and Croatia;
- To explore the effects of religious and political variables on the perceptions of institutional and ideological secularism, and establishment;
- To test the impacts of institutional secularism, ideological secularism, and establishment on the three dimensions (societal, individual, expression of religion) of religious freedom.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first part presents the demographic features of the two samples: Croatian and Italian. The second part examines the control variables, reporting the results of the descriptive statistics and comparing the features of the two samples. The third part reports the results of the descriptive analysis of independent and dependent variables, highlighting whether there were statistically significant differences between the Italian and Croatian groups. In the third part, it describes the results of ANOVA tests that have been performed to see whether religious and political groups differed in their support for institutional and ideological secularism, and establishment. Finally, the chapter will show the outcomes of

Pearson correlation and regressions analysis, performed in order to assess the impact of control and independent variables on religious freedom's dimensions.

5.1 Description of the samples

The data presented in this chapter were collected at the University of Padua and at the University of Zagreb between September 2021 and January 2022. In total, there were 1,317 participants: 714 Italian students and 603 Croatian ones.

Overall, 75% of participants in the survey were female (N=991), with only 25% male (N=324). Their age ranged from 18 to 24 years, with a mean age of 19. Most students were studying for bachelor's degrees (78%), and the remaining 22% for master's degrees. In Croatia, respondents studied law, economics, as well as social sciences, while in Italy, they studied international relations, political sciences, humanities and cinema, music, and art sciences.

The majority of participants held Croatian or Italian citizenship (99% in Croatia and 94% in Italy), while 94% of participants were born in Croatia and 91% in Italy. Among Italians, 29% declared themselves to have come from urban areas, 43% from suburban, and 28% from rural. Among Croats, 50% affirmed coming from urban areas, 28% from suburban, and 22% from rural.

In both samples, 78% of respondents stated that they perceived their family income as middle. In the case of Italy, 14% affirmed that it was low and 8% high, while in the case of Croatia, it was the opposite: 8% of the students reported that their family income was low, and 14% that it was high.

Concerning respondents' parents' level of education, in both samples, in the majority of cases, both parents completed higher education. In Italy, 23% of respondents' mothers and 22% of their fathers held a university degree, while 22% of the mothers and 29% of the fathers reached only a secondary school certificate. In Croatia, by contrast, only 4% of mothers and fathers only completed secondary school, while 39% of both held a higher education diploma.

5.2 Differences and similarities between the two samples

Besides sex (whose percentages we saw in the previous section), our conceptual model includes five control variables: religious affiliation, political orientation, and religiosity. In the following section, we will present descriptive statistics of each variable and results of statistical tests to compare the groups.

5.2.1 Religious affiliation

Concerning religious affiliation, in both countries, most of the participants identified themselves with Catholicism (54.2% in Italy, and 77.4% in Croatia) (Tab. 5.1). However, while in Italy No Religion amounted to 39.1%, in Croatia they were 19.4%. The same was true for religious minorities: while in Italy they covered 7% of the sample, in Croatia, they made up only 3%. In Italy, participants that belonged to minorities were Muslims (2.4%), Orthodox Christians (1.7%), Protestants (0.8%), members of other Christian traditions (0.4%), Pentecostals (0.1%), Sikhs (0.1%), and others (1.1%). Instead in Croatia, they were Muslims (1.3%), Orthodox Christians (0.2%), Protestants (0.2%), Jews (0.2%), members of other Christian traditions (0.2%), and others (1.2%).

Tab.5.1

Religious affiliations of Italian and Croatian participants

Religious Affiliation	Italy		Croatia	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Catholics	384	54.2	467	77.4
No Religion	277	39.1	117	19.4
Muslims	17	2.4	8	1.3
Christian Orthodox	12	1.7	1	0.2
Protestants	6	0.8	1	0.2
Pentecostals	1	0.1	N.p.	N.p.
Jews	N.p.	N.p.	1	0.2
Sikhs	1	0.1	N.p.	N.p.
Other Christian traditions	3	0.4	1	0.2
Other religions	8	1.1	7	1.2
Total	709	100	603	100

Notes. Np: Not present.

In the multivariate and inferential statistics, we decided to use a reduced version of the variable, summarizing the multiple groups into three: No Religion, Catholics and Others. Tab. 5.2 presents the new percentages.

Tab. 5.2

Frequencies of religious affiliations (recoded variable)

Religious Affiliation	Italy		Croatia		Full Sample	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
No Religion	277	39	117	19	394	30
Catholics	384	54	467	78	851	65
Others	48	7	19	3	67	5
Total	709	100	603	100	1312	100

5.2.2 Religiosity

The variable religiosity was a multi-item scale composed of three items: one concerning the attendance of religious rites, the second about the frequency of solitary prayer, and the third about believing in God.

Religious attendance

Religious attendance was measured on a 6-point scale, where 1=never, 2=occasionally, 3=a few times a year, 4=at least once a month, 5=at least once a week, 6=nearly every day. Looking at the percentages (Fig. 5.1), in Italy, 12% of the young people declared that they attended religious services regularly (monthly and weekly), 13% a few times a year, 24% do so occasionally, and 51% never attend them. By contrast, in Croatia, 24% of the students said that they attend religious services monthly, weekly, or more often, while 24% a few times a year, 20% occasionally, and 32% never.

Fig. 5.1

Frequencies (%) of attendance religious services among Italians and Croats respondents
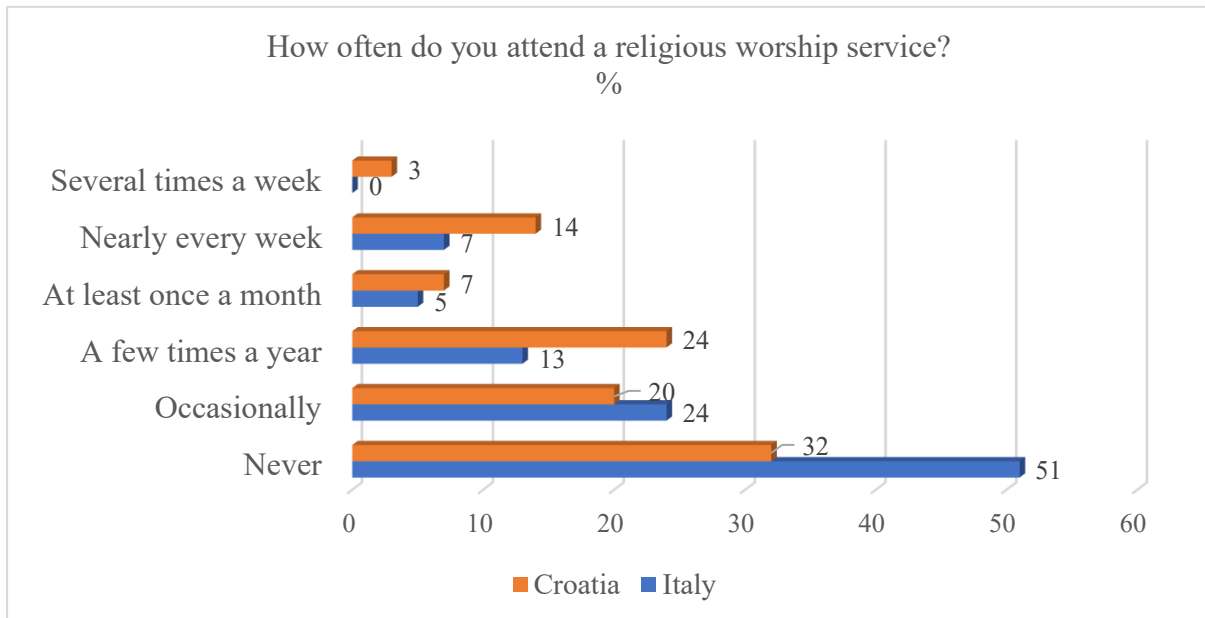
In the case of Italian students, the statistical mean of the item responses was 1.94 (SD=1.22), while in the case of Croatians, it was 2.63 (SD=1.5).

Frequency of religious prayer

The same scale from 1= never to 5=several times a week was used to measure the frequency of religious prayer. Percentages reported in Fig. 5.2 show that a large majority (63%) of Italian respondents declared that they never pray on their own, while only 15% affirmed doing it weekly or monthly. By contrast, in the case of Croatia, 43% of participants declared that they pray weekly or monthly on their own, while 29% did it never.

Fig. 5.2

Frequencies (%) of religious prayer among Italians and Croatians

How often do you pray in your home or by yourself?
%

Category	Croatia	Italy
Several times a week	29	9
Nearly every week	10	4
At least once a month	4	2
A few times a year	6	4
Occasionally	22	18
Never	29	63
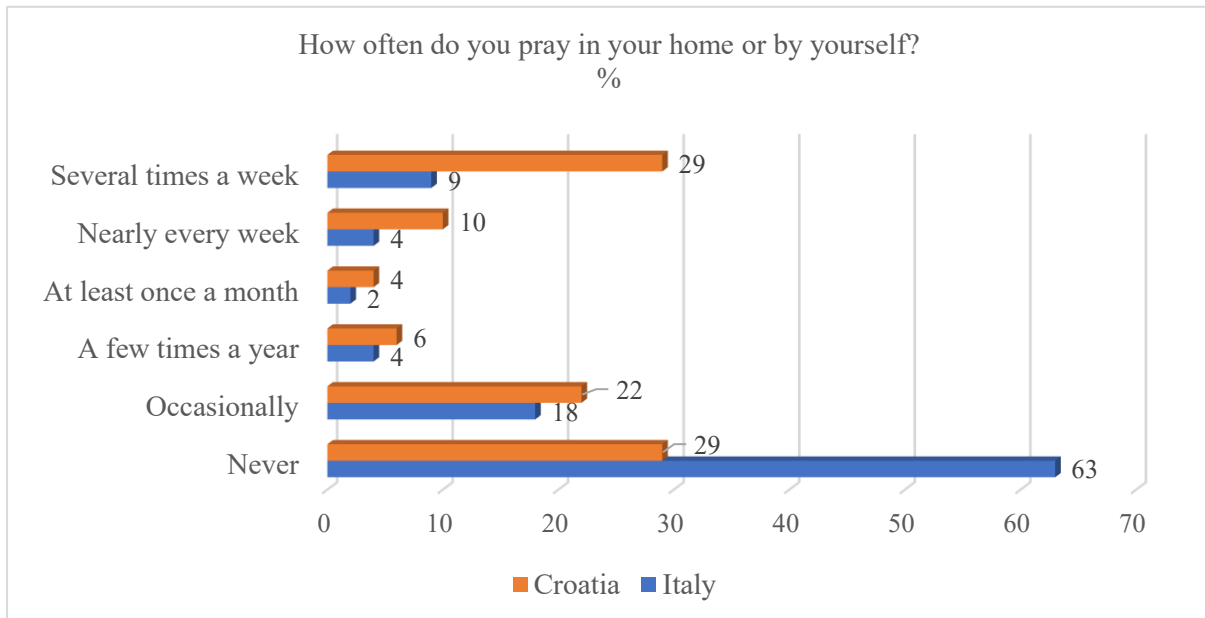
For Italy, the statistical mean of the item was 1.92 (SD=1.6); for Croatia, it was 3.30 (SD=2.09)

Belief in God

Finally, we used a six-point scale to ask the participants how much they agree with the statement "I believe in God" (0=not applicable, 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=Not Certain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). The findings showed (Fig. 5.3) that in the Italian sample 8% of the students declared that the statement did not apply to them, 37% disagreed with the affirmation (26% strongly disagreed and 11% disagreed), 20% were not certain, and 35% agreed (25% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed). Conversely, in the Croatian sample most of the students agreed with the statement (30% agreed and 39% strongly agreed, in total 69%). Only 12% of them disagreed, while 14% were not certain, and 6% considered the statement not applicable to them.

Fig. 5.3

Frequencies (%) of respondents declaring to believe in God in Italy and Croatia
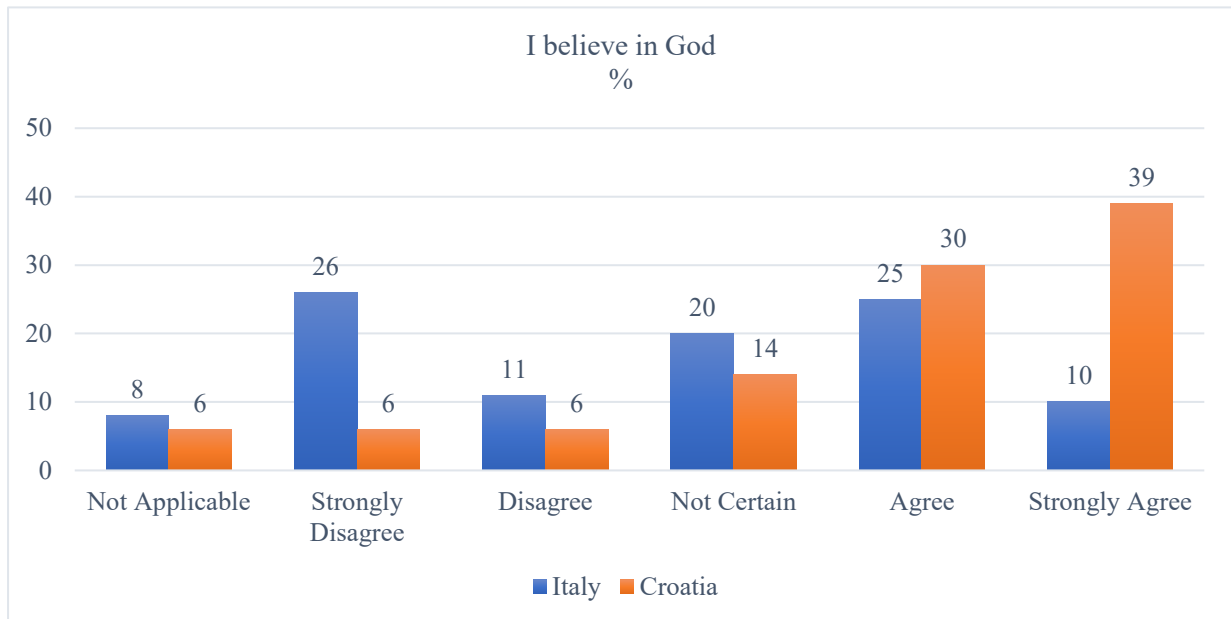
In this case, the statistical mean of the item was 2.83 (SD=1.39) for Italy, and 3.95 (SD=1.17) for Croatia.

5.2.3 Political orientation

Concerning political orientation, to measure it we used a 10-point scale where 1 corresponded to the left and 10 to the right. 62.7% of the Italian respondents declared that they recognized themselves between 1 and 4, 26.2% between 5 and 6, and 11.1% between 7 and 10. On the contrary, the majority of Croatian students (44.1%), placed themselves between 5 and 6, with 37% between 1 and 4, and the remaining 18.9% between 7 and 10 (Fig.5.4).

Fig. 5.4

Political orientations among Italians and Croats

Political Orientation
%
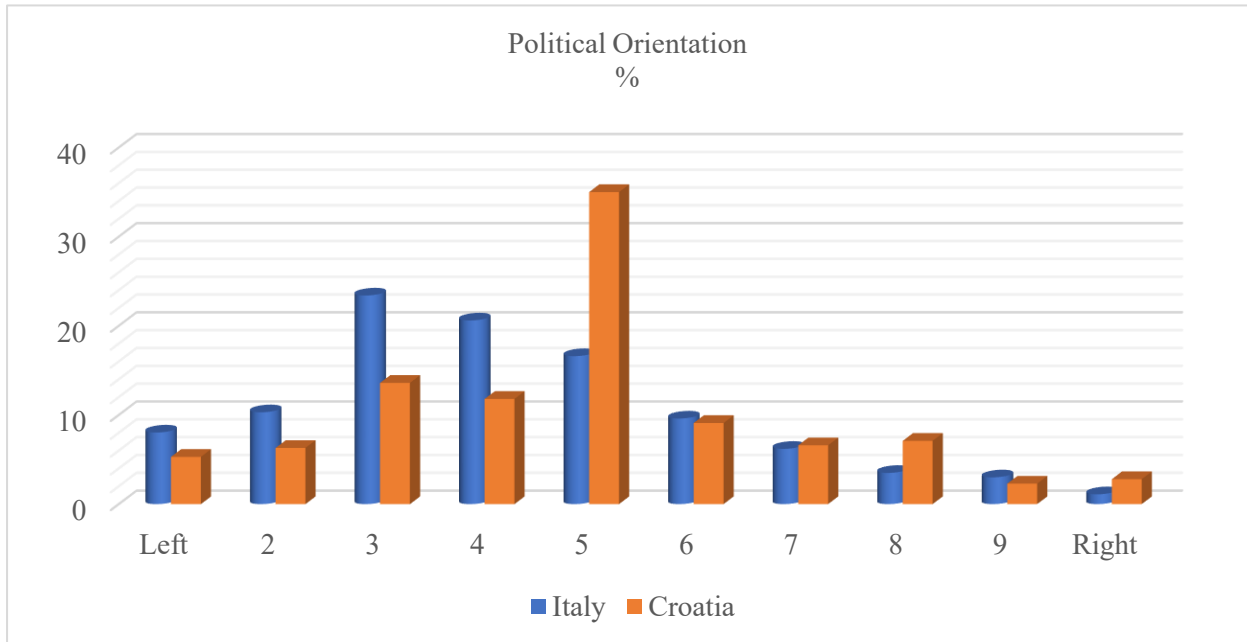
5.2.4 *Political inclusion*

In the analysis of politics and human rights, other interesting aspects of the political profile are commitment and activism (Sheka & Pederson, 2013). To measure them, we have computed a scale composed of three items: 'political information', 'political activity', and 'political interest'. Following Breskaya et al. (2020) we called this variable *political inclusion*.

Political information

Regarding 'political information', we asked participants how often they followed politics on media, and we used a five-point scale (1=never, 2=occasionally, 3=at least once a month, 4=at least once a week, 5=nearly every day) to collect the responses. Looking at Fig. 5.5, one may see that in Italy, most of the students (64%) followed politics on media weekly or daily, 7% at least once a month, and 29% just occasionally or never. In Croatia, on the contrary, half of the participants (50%) followed politics on media occasionally or never, while 43% did so weekly or daily, and 7% at least once a month.

Fig. 5.5

Overview of political information among Italians and Croats (%)
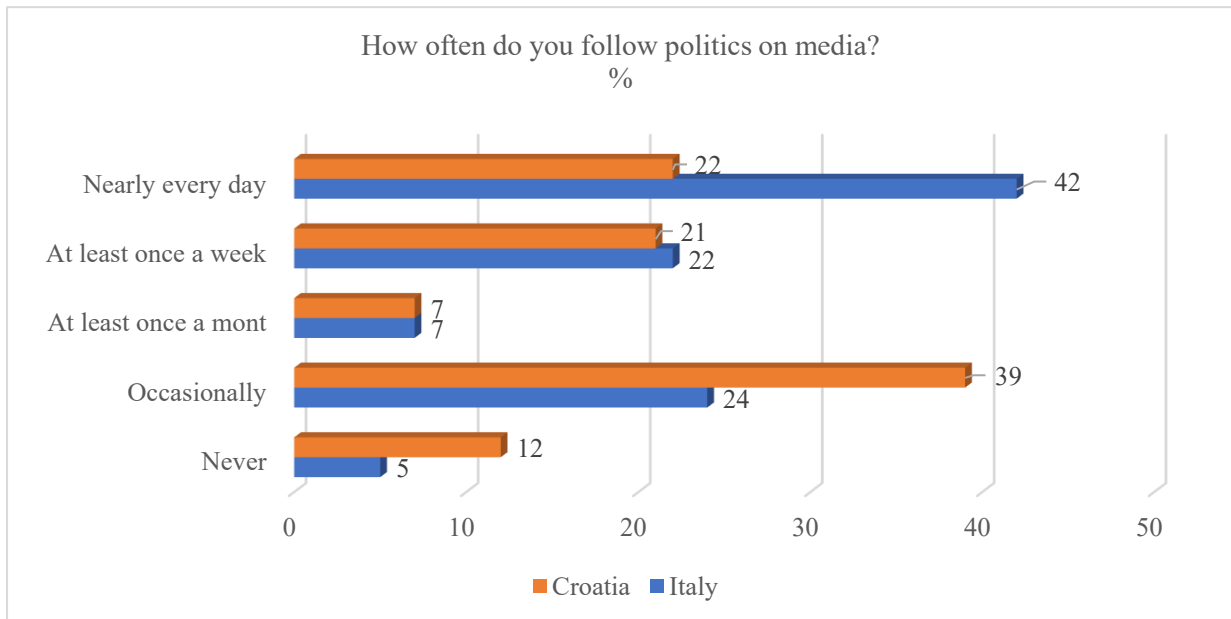
The value of the statistical mean of the item was higher for Italians (M=3.71, SD= 1.45) than for Croats (M= 3.03, SD=1.40).

Political activity

To measure both 'political activity' and 'political interest' we used a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not certain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). In the first case, students had to use it to answer the question 'I am included in Italian/Croatian political life', in the second the question 'I am interested in politics'. Looking at Fig. 5.6, we see that in Italy 43% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the first statement, while 40% agreed or strongly agreed with it. 16% were not certain. In the case of Croatia, as well, 45% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 27% agreed or strongly agreed. Here, the number of not certain was higher (28%).

Fig. 5.6

Overview of political activity among Italians and Croats (%)

I am included in Italian/Croatian political life %

(Bar chart)

Strongly Disagree — Italy: 10, Croatia: 10
Disagree — Italy: 33, Croatia: 35
Not Certain — Italy: 16, Croatia: 28
Agree — Italy: 32, Croatia: 22
Strongly Agree — Italy: 8, Croatia: 5

Italy Croatia
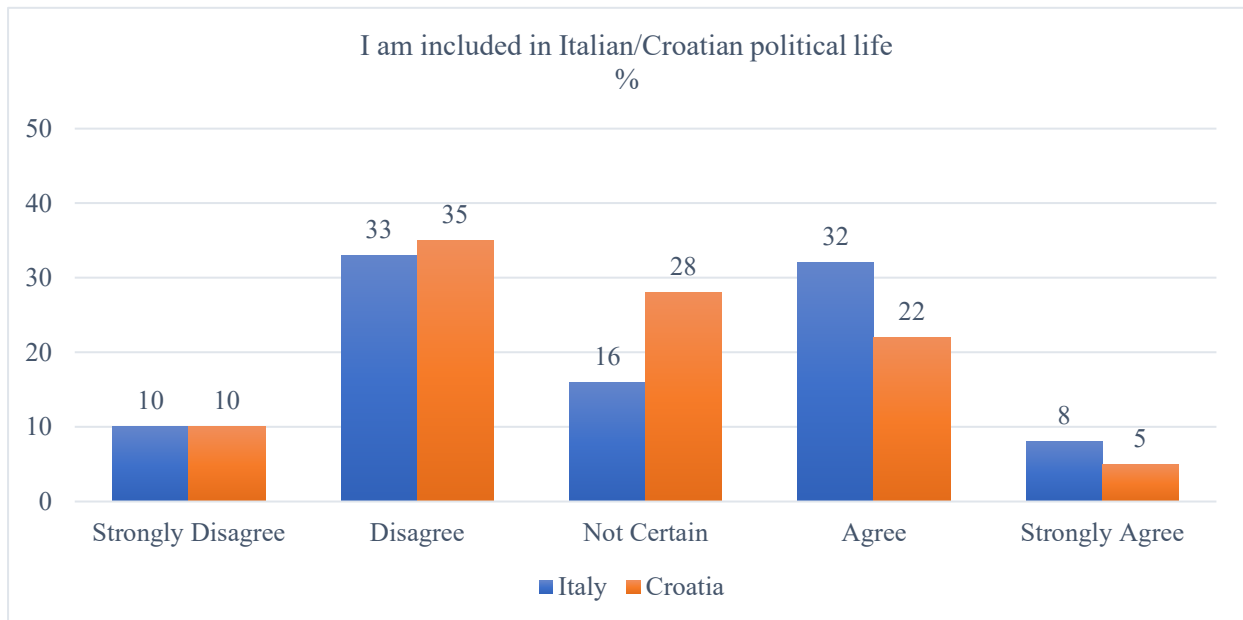
Political interest

When it comes to the second item 'I am interested in politics', as one may see in Fig. 5.7, 17% of Italian students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 9% were not certain, and 74% agreed or strongly disagreed. Among Croatians, by contrast, 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, 22% were not certain, and 44% agreed or strongly agreed.

Fig. 5.7

Overview of political interest among Italians and Croats (%)
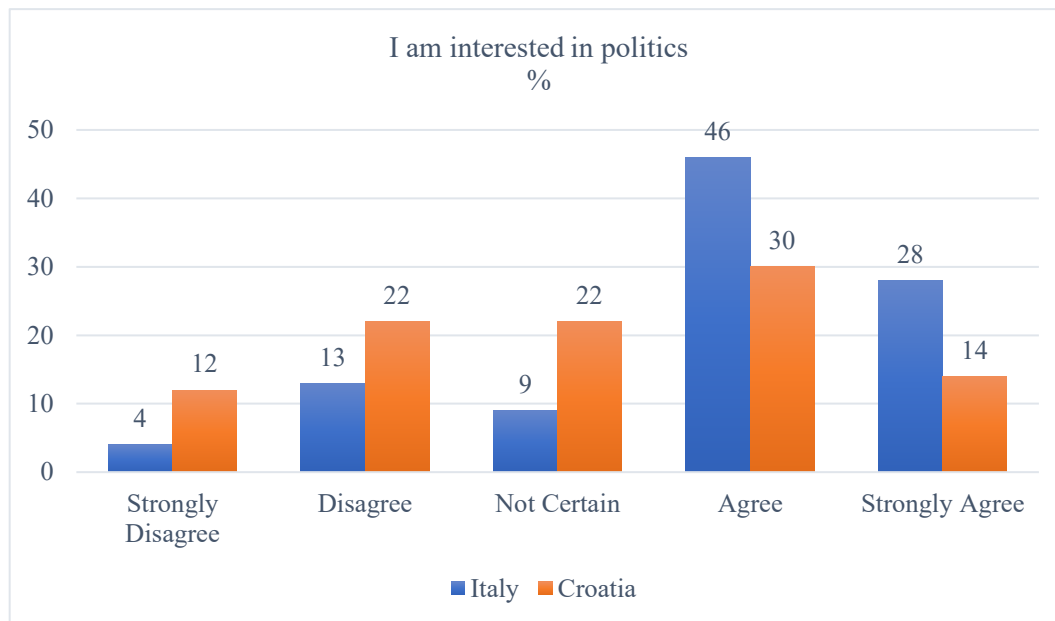
The statistical mean of the responses was 2.95 (SD=1.18) for Italy, and 2.79 (SD=1.06) for Croatia.

5.2.5 Comparing the groups

As mentioned in the chapter on the national contexts, the Italian religious landscape is characterized by a higher religious diversity compared to Croatia. To know whether there were also differences on religious affiliation between our samples, we used a χ^2 test with $\alpha = .05$ as a criterion for significance. The difference resulted in statistically significant χ^2 (2, 1312) = 77.57, *p*< .001 for all three relative proportions. We assessed that in the Italian sample No-religion and religious Others were higher in number than in the Croatian one, while in the Croatian sample Catholics were more numerous than in the Italian one.

Concerning the other three control variables (*religiosity*, *political orientation*, *political inclusion*), after having put focus on the contents of the scales and on how the respondents valued them, we looked for every significant difference between the values of the two groups. The results for the means, standard deviations and the t-test are reported in the Tab. 5.3.

The t-tests showed that the main difference between Italians and Croats could be seen in the average score on *religiosity*. That of the Italians was lower than the score of the Croats. This was also illustrated in the significant difference between the two groups, t (1107) = -13.7, *p* = < .001. Croats were significantly more religious than Italians.

Tab.5.3 *Mean scores and standard deviations, results of the t-test for Italians and Croats*

	Italy		Croatia		
	M	SD	M	SD	T
Religiosity	2.15	1.22	3.20	1.44	-13.7[**]
Political orientation	4.07	1.88	4.88	2.04	-7.27[**]
Political engagement	3.50	1.01	2.99	1.04	8.61[**]

Notes: [*]p<.05; [**]p<.001.

The two groups also differed on *political orientation*. In this case, too, the average mean of Italians was lower than the mean of Croats, as confirmed by the t-test, $t(1221) = -7.27$, $p = <$ .001. This means that respondents in the Croatian sample tended more towards the right side of the spectrum, compared to Italian ones.

Finally, the t-test results revealed that there was also a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of Italian and Croats concerning *political inclusion*, $t(1171) = 8.61$, $p = <. 001$. In this case, Italians' scores were higher than those of Croats: respondents in that sample were more politically involved than those in the Croatian group.

5.3 Comparing religious freedom social perceptions in Italy and Croatia

This section presents, first, the descriptive statistics of the three dependent variables on religious freedom, and second, the results of t-tests performed to examine whether there were significant differences between Italian and Croatian students in their support of the three dimensions of religious freedom.

5.3.1 Descriptive statistics

Rf as a societal value, *Rf as individual value*, and *Rf as freedom to express religion* were all multi-item scales, designed to measure the students' attitudes toward three different dimensions of religious freedom. They respectively referred to religious freedom as a democratic and non-discrimination principle, as the right to spiritual fulfilment, and as the right to practice and express religious convictions in public. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = not certain, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly).

Looking at the means and percentages of every item (Tab. 5.4) referring to *Rf as a societal value*, one may see that, on average, most of the Italian and Croatian students tended to agree with all the statements. In the Italian sample, the item with which the students agreed the least was the third item (III) (M=4.72, SD=0.61) which referred to legal equality of religions, while the one with which they agreed the most was the first one (I) (M=4.81, SD=0.46), focused on the individual freedom to choose identity. By contrast, in the case of Croatia, students agreed the least with the fourth item (IV) (M=4.45, SD=0.84), which represented religious freedom as a tool to build a peaceful religiously pluralistic society, and the most with the first item (I) (M=4.63, SD=0.69), just as in Italy.

In the case of the other two variables, *Rf as individual value* and *Rf as freedom to express religion*, one may observe (Tab. 5.5, and Tab 5.6) that the percentages and means show a general agreement with all the statements, even though the values were slightly lower than the descriptive index of the items of the first variable.

Three items formed the scale *Rf as individual value*. As Tab. 5.5 shows, on average, the third item (III), describing religious freedom as the possibility to autonomously search their spiritual fulfillment, received more support than the other two items among both Italian (M=4.12, SD=0.87) and Croatian students (M=4.17, SD=0.75), while the first (I) about the idea of religious freedom as related to the concept of human dignity, received the least (for Italy M=3.74, SD=1.09; for Croatia M=3.83; SD=0.90).

Rf as freedom to express religions was composed of three items. This scale referred to religious freedom as the right to practice and be present in the public sphere, expressing religious convictions in the media and publications. Descriptive statistics show (Tab. 5.6) that, in this case too, both Italian and Croatian students tended to agree with all the items of the scale. Among the three items, the third (III), about religious symbols in public spaces, on average, received the highest approval from both Italian (M=4.33, SD=0.83) and Croatian (M = 4.10, SD = 1.01) students. In Croatia, the second item (II) about the freedom to express religious convictions in the media was the one that received less support (M=3.70, SD=1.04). The same item was   also the one with the largest percentage difference in agreement (more than 10 points) between Italian and Croatian students (in Italy 76% of students agreed with the statement, in Croatia 63%).

Tab.5.4

Overview of the dependent variable Rf as societal value (frequencies %, means, standard deviations)

Items	N	AGR.	NC	DIS.	M	SD
		%	%	%		
I.Identity						
Italy	713	98	1	0.3	4.81	0.46
Croatia	603	95	3	2	4.63	0.69
II.Non-discrimination						
Italy	710	98	1	1	4.80	0.47
Croatia	603	92	5	3	4.58	0.76
III.Eq. before the law						
Italy	709	95	3	2	4.72	0.61
Croatia	603	89	7	4	4.49	0.86
IV. Non-viol. coexist.						
Italy	712	97	2	1	4.75	0.56
Croatia	603	87	10	3	4.45	0.84

Notes. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not certain, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree);

AGR=Strongly Agree + Agree, NC=Not Certain, DIS.=Strongly Disagree+Agree;

Identity: 'Freedom to choose my religious/non-religious identity'; Non-discrimination: 'Non-discrimination for religious minorities on the basis of religion'; Eq. Before the Law: 'Equality of various religions in society before the law'; Non-viol. Coexist.: 'Non-violent co-existence for all religions in every society'.

Tab. 5.5

Overview of the dependent variable Rf as individual value (frequencies %, means, standard deviations)

Items	N	AGR.	NC	DIS.	M	SD
		%	%	%		
I Human Dignity						
Italy	707	68	15	17	3.74	1.09
Croatia	602	68	24	8	3.83	0.90
II Individual Truth						
Italy	710	78	13	9	4.00	0.94
Croatia	602	78	17	5	3.99	0.85
III Spiritual Fulfillment						
Italy	706	83	11	6	4.12	0.87
Croatia	602	87	11	2	4.17	0.75

Notes. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = not certain, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly);

AGR=Strongly Agree + Agree, NC=Not Certain, DIS.=Strongly Disagree + Agree;

Human Dignity: 'It is connected with the idea of human dignity'; Individual Truth: 'It is connected with the search for individual truth'; Spiritual Fulfillment: 'It allows everyone to pursue their personal spiritual fulfillment'.

Tab.5.6

Overview Rf as freedom to express religion variable (frequencies %, means, standard deviations)

	N	AGR.	NC	DIS.	M	SD
		%	%	%		
I. Disseminate Religion						
Italy	710	79	13	8	3.95	0.91
Croatia	603	71	22	7	3.88	0.92
II. Expr. Rel. in the media						
Italy	709	76	14	10	3.95	0.98
Croatia	603	63	25	12	3.70	1.04
III. Religious symbols						
Italy	711	88	7	5	4.33	0.83
Croatia	603	78	14	8	4.10	1.01

Notes. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = not certain, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly);

AGR=Strongly Agree + Agree, NC=Not Certain, DIS.=Strongly Disagree + Agree; Disseminate Religion: 'Freedom to write, issue and disseminate religious publications'; Expr.Rel. in the media: 'Freedom to express religious views in the media'; Religious Symbols: 'Freedom to wear religious clothes/symbols in public places'.

5.3.2 Comparing the groups

We wished to examine whether Italian and Croatian students significantly differ in their support of the three dimensions of religious freedom (societal, individual, and freedom of expression). We hypothesized that Italian students would support religious freedom more than Croatian students, in all its three dimensions. Therefore, we performed three Student's t-tests, one for each of the three variables. Our null hypothesis (H_0) claimed that the average scores of the three variables (*Rf as societal value*, *Rf as individual value*, and *Rf as freedom to express Religion*) would not differ between Italian (μ_1) and Croatian students (μ_2). By contrast, our

alternative hypothesis (H$_a$) stated that there would be a difference. In all three cases, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H$_a$) was supported.

In Tab.5.7, means, standard deviations, and t-test results are reported for both samples. Concerning the variable *Rf as a societal value*, Italian students (M=4.77, SD=0.37) turned out to support this dimension of religious freedom significantly more than did Croatian students (M=4.54, SD=0.66), t (1307) = 7.91, *p*<.001. By contrast, Croatian students (M=3.99, SD=0.69) supported significantly more than Italian students (M= 3.95, SD=0.78) the idea of *Rf as individual value*, t (1304) = -1.03, *p*< .001. Finally, young Italians (M=4.08, SD=0.72) were significantly more in favour   of the idea of *Rf as the freedom to express religion* publicly than young Croatians (M=3.89, SD=0.82), t (1305) =4.33, *p* = .001.

Tab. 5.7

Italians and Croats on religious freedom (means, standard deviations, t-test)

	Italy		Croatia		
	M	SD	M	SD	T
Rf as a societal value	4.77	0.37	4.54	0.66	7.91[**]
Rf as an ind. value	3.95	0.78	3.99	0.69	-1.03[**]
Rf as freed to expr. rel.	4.08	0.72	3.89	0.82	4.33[*]

Notes: [*]*p*<.05; [**]*p*<.001.

5.4 Comparing attitudes towards secularism and religious establishment in Italy and Croatia

In this section, we will present the descriptive statistics of our three independent variables: *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*. Moreover, for every variable, we will show the results of the t-test that we performed to assess whether Italian and Croatian respondents differ in their support for each of the three religion-politics models.

5.4.1 Attitudes towards institutional secularism in Italy and Croatia

Institutional secularism refers to the idea that state institutions must be separated from religious ones, 'the religious' from 'the political', yet without having a conflictual approach to religion in general. It is critical of assigning to the dominant religion excessive power to influence state policies, but it is supportive of the presence of religion in the public sphere, religious pluralism, and religious minorities' rights. To measure it, we have computed a scale composed of three items, all referring to religion and State separation, and respect for pluralism, with religions

participating in politics and society. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale. Respondents were asked to assess 'how much they agree with the following statements', using a five-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = not certain, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly).

Tab. 5.8 shows the descriptive statistics of each item. It is possible to observe that both Italian and Croatian students most supported the third item (III) (in Italy, M=4.27, SD=0.83; in Croatia, M=4.13, SD=0.82), but showed less support for the second (II), that is, the one that explicitly refers to politics and culture (in Italy, M=3.96, SD=0.95; in Croatia, M=3.77, SD=1.04). However, this latter is also the item with the higher number of uncertain respondents (in Italy, 12%, and in Croatia 32%). In general, we found that in the Croatian students' sample the percentage of uncertainty about all the questions was higher than in the Italian one.

Tab. 5.8

Overview of institutional secularism variable Italy and Croatia (frequencies %, means, SD)

	N	AGR.	NC	DIS.	M	SD
		%	%	%		
I Item						
Italy		83	6	11	4.13	0.99
Croatia		70	23	7	3.95	0.92
II Item						
Italy		76	12	12	3.96	0.95
Croatia		60	32	8	3.77	1.04
III Item						
Italy		86	10	4	4.27	0.83
Croatia		79	19	2	4.13	0.82

Notes. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 =disagree,3=not certain,4=agree, 5 = agree strongly); AGR=Strongly Agree + Agree, NC=Not Certain, DIS.=Strongly Disagree + Agree; I Item: 'State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and allow them to be present in the public sphere'; II Item: 'The state should be legally separated from all religions but support religious pluralism and participation of various religions in political and cultural spheres'; III Item: 'The right to have one's 'difference' (minority religiosity, ethnicity, etc.) should be recognized and supported in the public and private sphere'.

5.4.2 Attitudes towards ideological secularism in Italy and Croatia

Unlike *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism* adopts a conflictual stance toward religion: beyond the separation between State and religion, its supporters also advocate for the marginalization of religion and its confinement to the private sphere.

To capture this viewpoint, we computed a scale formed by two items. Looking at Tab. 5.9 it is possible to observe that, compared to *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism* found lower support in both samples.

Tab. 5.9

Overview of ideological secularism variable in Italy and Croatia (%, means, SD)

	N	AGR.	NC	DIS.	MEAN	SD
		%	%	%		
I Item						
Italy		55	15	30	3.43	1.23
Croatia		43	27	30	3.26	1.2
II Item						
Italy		12	21	67	2.29	0.97
Croatia		15	32	53	2.49	0.99

Notes. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 =disagree,3=not certain,4=agree, 5 = agree strongly); AGR=Strongly Agree + Agree, NC=Not Certain, DIS.=Strongly Disagree + Agree; I Item: 'State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and confine all religious expressions in the private sphere'; II Item: 'It is better if State controls religions and does not allow it to be present in the public sphere'.

In particular, for the second item (II), which claimed that the State should control religion and confine it to the private sphere, we observed that the means are both under the threshold of 3 (in Italy, M=2.29, SD=0.97; in Croatia, M=2.49, SD=0.99). Also looking at the percentage columns, one may note that more than half of the students in the two samples disagreed with the statement (in Italy, 67%; in Croatia, 53%). By contrast, in the case of the first item (I), a slight majority of Italian students (55%) agreed with it, while among the Croatians only 43%. In both cases, it is fair to highlight the high number of uncertain, higher in Croatia than in Italy.

5.4.3 Attitudes towards religious establishment in Italy and Croatia

The last independent variable was the *establishment*. It concerns the idea of the union or alliance between Church/religion/set of religions and the State.

In this case too, we used a multi-item scale, composed of three items. Descriptive statistics (Tab.5.10) shows that, in general, Italian and Croatian students disagreed with all three items (means < 3). However, looking at the percentages, one may see that there were some relevant differences between Italy and Croatia. First, while in Italy the large majority of students disagreed with all three items (respectively 79%; 76%; 83%), in Croatia, except in the case of the first item (I) where slightly more than half of the students (55%) openly opposed it, only a minority disagreed with the second (II) (40%) and the third (III) (41%). Second, compared to Italy, in Croatia, we observe a high number of uncertain respondents. Third, although the agreement rates were low in both countries, in Croatia they were in all cases more than twice as high as in Italy.

Tab. 5.10

Overview of religious establishment variable in Italy and Croatia (%, means, SD)

	N	AGR.	NC	DIS.	M	SD
		%	%	%		
I Item						
Italy		10	11	79	1.88	1.03
Croatia		20	25	55	2.42	1.19
II Item						
Italy		10	14	76	1.92	1.06
Croatia		21	39	40	2.69	1.12
III Item						
Italy		6	11	83	1.75	0.9
Croatia		21	38	41	2.71	1.11

Notes. All the items were measured with a five-point Likert-type-like response scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 =disagree,3=not certain,4=agree, 5 = agree strongly); AGR=Strongly Agree + Agree, NC=Not Certain, DIS.=Strongly Disagree + Agree; I Item: 'State should guarantee special legal status of Catholicism and support close ties between Catholicism, politics, and culture'; II Item: 'State should guarantee special legal status of a preferred set of religions and recognize special role of them in cultural and political sphere', III Item: 'The Catholic Church as part of Italian/Croatian identity should be favored in society'.

5.4.4 Comparing the groups

Three Student's t-tests were performed to see whether there was a significant difference between the two groups—Italian and Croatian one—in terms of their support of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* models. We presumed that Italians supported institutional and *ideological secularism* more than Croats did, while Croats endorsed more religious *establishment*.

Tab. 5.11 reports means, standard deviations, and t-test results for the two samples. Concerning *institutional secularism*, the average score of the Italian sample was 4.13 (SD=0.37), while in the Croatian one it was 3.95 (SD=0.03). The student's t-test showed that the difference was statistically significant, t (1184) = 4.34, $p<.001$. This means that, although in both countries the participants in the survey, on average, supported *institutional secularism* (as the average score of the variable is in both cases higher than 3), in Croatia it found significantly lower support than in Italy.

Unlike in the case of *institutional secularism*, for *ideological secularism*, the Student's t-test results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the support of *ideological secularism*.

Finally, in the case of *establishment*, the t-test results showed that Croatian students (M= 2.61, SD=0.98) support this model significantly more than Italian ones (M=1.83, SD=0.84), t (1188) = -14.77, $p< .001$.

Tab. 5.11

Italians and Croats on secularism and establishment (means, SD, t-test)

	Italy		Croatia		
	M	SD	M	SD	T
Institutional secularism	4.13	0.37	3.95	0.03	4.34[**]
Ideological secularism	2.87	0.89	2.85	0.03	-.48
Establishment	1.83	0.84	2.61	0.98	-14.77[*]

Notes: [*]$p<.05$; [**]$p<.001$

5.5 Differences among religious and political groups

As mentioned above, one of the objectives of this research project was to learn whether Italian and Croatian university students belonging to different religious groups (No Religion, Catholics, Others) and with different political orientations (Left, Center, Right) differed concerning their attitudes towards *institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*.

To assess it, for both countries, the average scores of the three independent variables were then compared for each category of religious affiliation and political orientation.

From the normality tests and visual boxplot analysis, it emerged that the distribution of the three variables (*institutional* and *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*) in the various religious and political groups does not always overlap with a normal distribution. Therefore, the assessment of statistical significance was conducted both with parametric tests (ANOVA) and with non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis). We used an alpha level of .05 for all statistical tests.

Religious affiliations

- *Italy*

In the case of the Italian sample, by analysing the average means of each religious group for the three independent variables (Tab.5.12), it was possible to see that, on average, Italian students favoured the model of *institutional secularism* more than the other two. Indeed, while for *institutional secularism* the average mean of all the three groups was >4, in the case of *ideological secularism* and *establishment* the average means were always < 3.

No Religion was the group that supports *institutional secularism* (M=4.09, SD=0.72) and *establishment* (M=1.38, SD=0.52) the least, while Others supported them the most (*institutional secularism*'s M=4.21, SD=0.64, *establishment*'s M=2.15, SD=1.01). For *ideological secularism*, it was the opposite: Others were the group least in favour of it (M= 2.68, SD=0.99), while No Religion favoured it the most (M=2.95, SD=0.96).

Regarding Catholics, on average, *institutional secularism* was the model they support most (M=4.14, SD=0.65), the second was *ideological secularism* (M=2.79, SD=0.81), and the one they endorsed least is *establishment* (M=2.10, SD=0.86).

Tab. 5.12

Average means of institutional and ideological secularism, and establishment by religious groups (Italy)

	N	M	SD	SD Err.
Institutional Secularism				
No Religion	253	4.09	0.72	0.05
Catholics	360	4.14	0.65	0.03
Others	43	4.21	0.64	0.10
Total	656	4.13	0.68	0.03
Ideological Secularism				
No Religion	254	2.95	0.96	0.06
Catholics	361	2.79	0.81	0.04
Others	41	2.68	0.99	0.15
Total	656	2.85	0.89	0.03
Establishment				
No Religion	255	1.38	0.52	0.03
Catholics	361	2.10	0.86	0.04
Others	43	2.15	1.01	0.15
Total	659	1.83	0.84	0.03

To test the hypothesis that the differences observed among the three religious groups in their level of support for *institutional* and *ideological secularism* and *establishment* were statistically significant, we performed three one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA). In all three cases, the independent variable represented the three different religious groups: 1) No Religion, 2) Catholics, and 3) Others. The dependent variables were in each case the average scores of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment* (see Tab. 5.11).

Before conducting ANOVA, Levene's test of equality of variances between groups was conducted. Based on the results that emerged, for *institutional secularism*, Fisher's classic ANOVA was then calculated as the groups were found to have homogenous variance within them, $p=.089$. On the other hand, for *ideological secularism* ($p=.025$) and *establishment* ($p<.001$), Welch's ANOVA was calculated as the groups were found to have heterogeneous variability within themselves.

The one-way ANOVA tests showed that there were statistically significant differences between the religious affiliation groups only for the *establishment* average scores Welch's $F(2,110.123) = 88.236$, $p<.001$. Thus, the null hypothesis of no difference between the average means of No Religion, Catholics, and Others, was rejected only in this case.

Post-hoc comparisons, using the Games-Howell post-hoc procedure, were conducted to determine which pairs of the three religious groups' means differed significantly on *establishment*. All differences were found to be statistically significant ($p<.001$) except for that between Others and Catholics ($p=.95$) (Fig.5.8).

Fig. 5.8

Differences among religious groups on establishment's support (Italy)
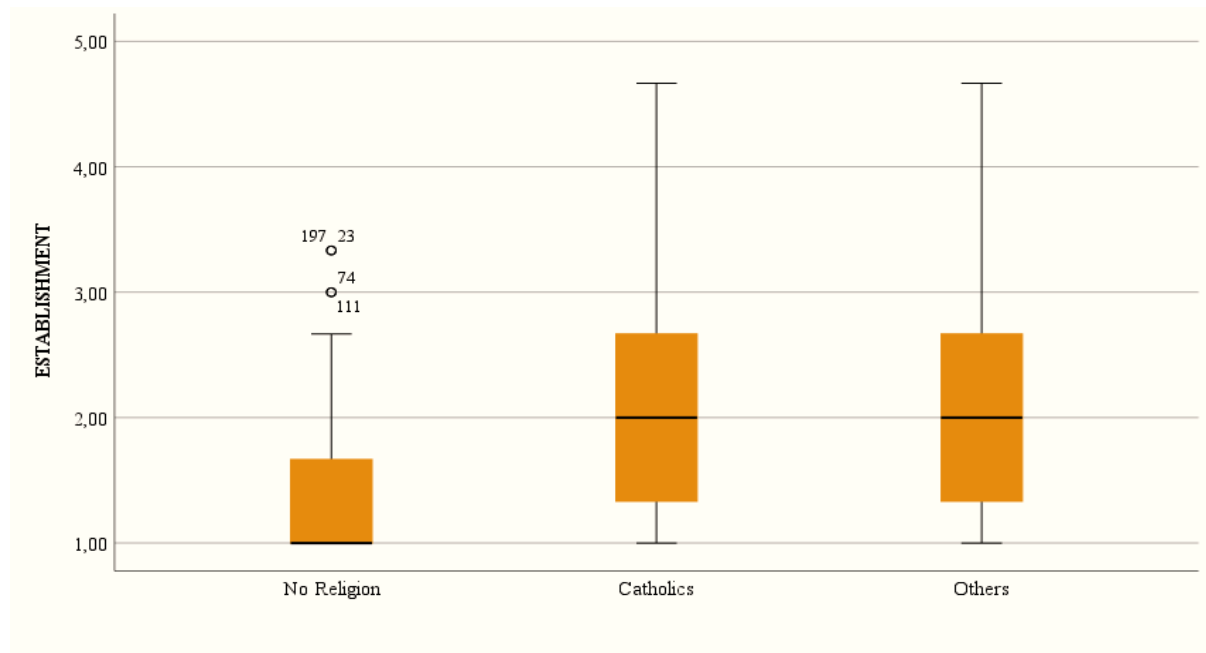
With regard to non-parametric tests, the results for pairwise group comparisons were fully overlapping with those of the parametric tests. More specifically, no statistically significant differences between groups were found on *institutional secularism*, H (2) =1.15, p=.56. At an initial stage, for *ideological secularism*, Kruskal-Wallis test's results showed evidence in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there were differences between the groups, H (2)=6.199, *p*=.045. However, in agreement with the findings of the parametric test, from the pairwise comparisons no statistically significant differences resulted between the groups.

Concerning *establishment*, by contrast, the differences between the groups was found to be statistically significant, H (2) =128.780, p<.001. From the pairwise comparisons, in this case, too, the statistically significant difference turned out to be the difference between No Religion and the other two groups (p <.001), while the difference between Others and Catholics was not statistically significant.

Croatia

As Tab. 5.13 shows, in the case of Croatia, on average, Catholics were the group that least supported both forms of secularism, *institutional* (M=3.90, SD=0.69) and *ideological* (M=2.83, SD=0.85), while they were the ones who most supported *establishment* (M=2.85, SD=0.87). Conversely, No Religion was the group that least endorsed *establishment* (M=1.69, SD=0.81) and the one that most endorsed *institutional* (M=4.14, SD=0.77) and *ideological* (M=3.04,

SD=0.91) secularism. In order, the Others supported: first, *institutional secularism* (M=4.11, SD=0.54), second, *ideological secularism* (M=2.93, SD=0.98), and third, *establishment* (M=1.96, SD=0.84).

Tab. 5.13

Average means of institutional and ideological secularism, and establishment by religious groups (Croatia)

	N	M	SD	SD Err.
Institutional Secularism				
No Religion	99	4.14	0.77	0.08
Catholics	413	3.90	0.69	0.03
Others	15	4.11	0.54	0.14
Total	527	3.95	0.71	0.03
Ideological Secularism				
No Religion	99	3.04	0.91	0.09
Catholics	413	2.83	0.85	0.04
Others	15	2.93	0.98	0.25
Total	527	2.87	0.87	0.04
Establishment				
No Religion	99	1.69	0.81	0.08
Catholics	413	2.85	0.87	0.04
Others	15	1.96	0.84	0.21
Total	527	2.61	0.98	0.04

For Croatia as well, we performed three one-way ANOVA (on the model adopted for Italy) to compare the effect of religious affiliation on respectively *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*.

In this case, too, Levene's test of equality of variances between groups was conducted before performing the ANOVA. Based on the results that emerged, for all three variables, institutional secularism (p=.166), ideological secularism (p=.922) and establishment (p=.4), Fisher's classic ANOVA was calculated as the groups were found to have homogenous variability within them. Unlike Italy, in Croatia, the ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant ($p<0.05$) difference in support of both institutional secularism and establishment between at least two of

the three religious groups (No Religion, Catholics, Others). By contrast, no difference was found in ideological secularism.

Games-Howell post-hoc tests for Croatia found that the average mean value of institutional secularism was significantly different only between No Religion and Catholics (p<.001). There was no statistically significant difference either between Catholics and Others (p=.48) or between No Religion and Others (p=.98) (Fig. 5.9).

Fig. 5.9 *Differences among religious groups on institutional* secularism *(Croatia)*
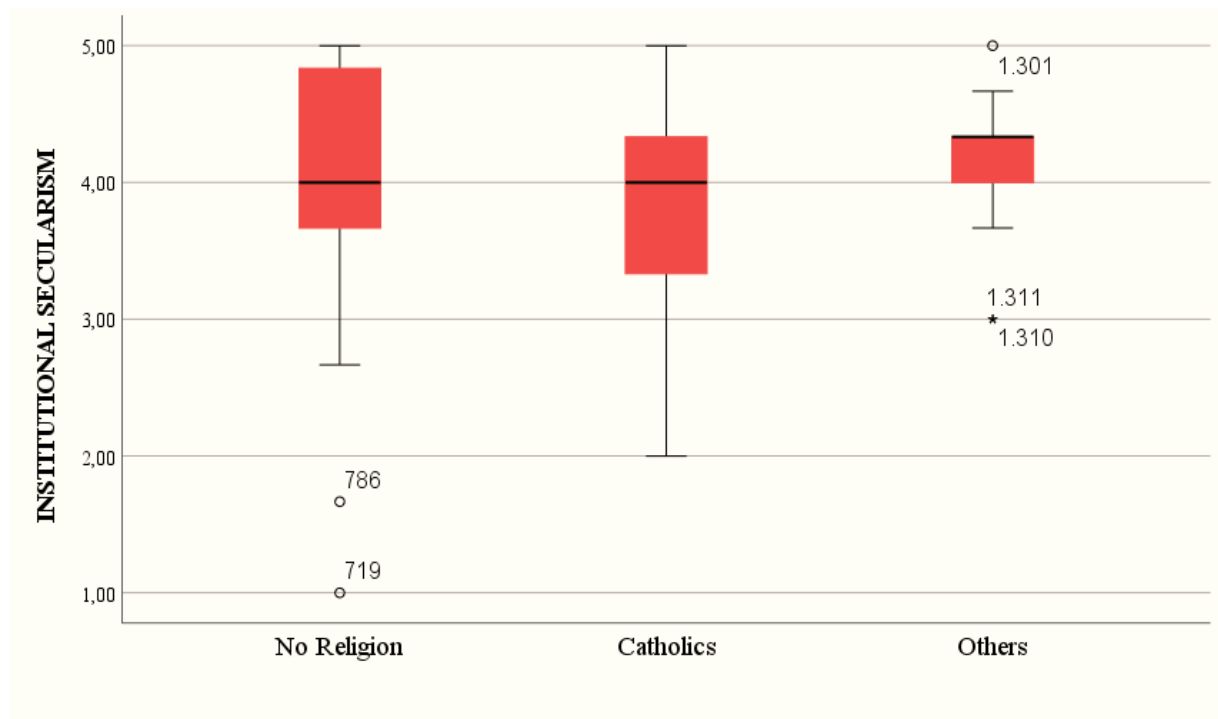
By contrast, the average mean value of support for *establishment* significantly differed between Catholics and the other two groups (*p*<.001). No difference was found between No Religion and Others (*p*=0.52) (see Fig.5.10).

Fig. 5.10

Differences among religious groups on establishment's support (Croatia)
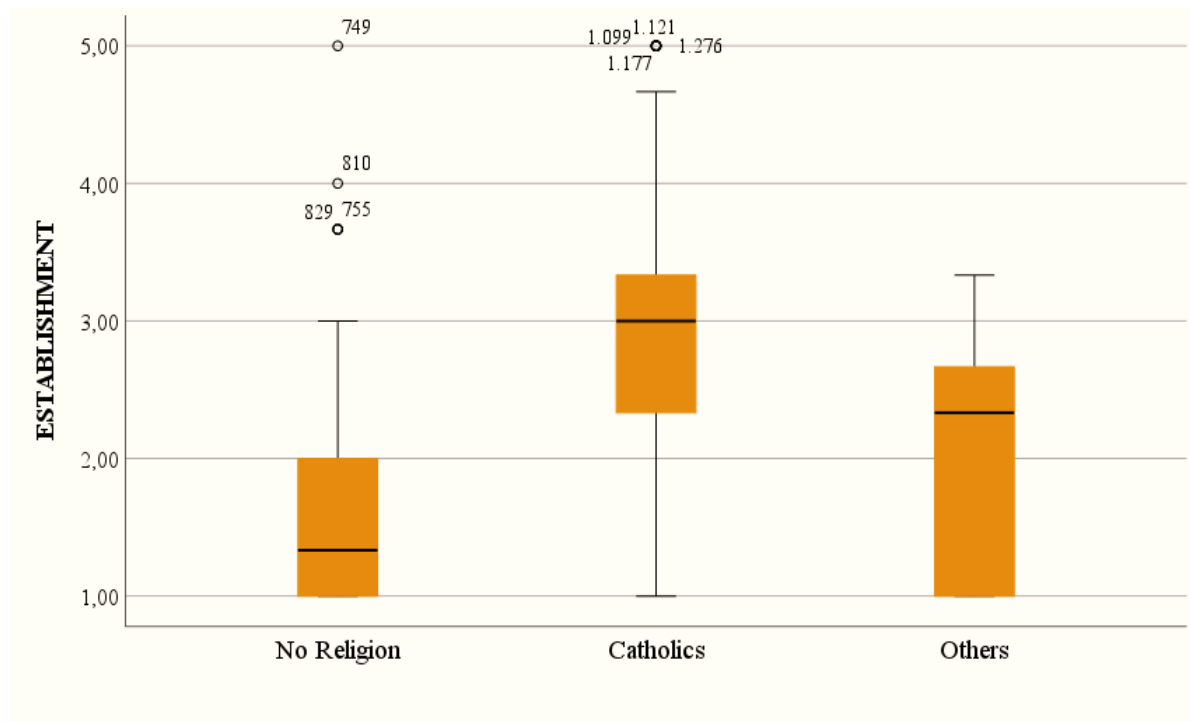
For the Croatian sample, too, the results for pairwise group comparisons were fully overlapping with those of the parametric tests. The differences between the groups turned out to be statistically significant for *institutional secularism* (H(2)=12.82, *p*=.002). From the pairwise comparisons, the only statistically significant difference was found to be that between Catholics and No Religion (*p*=.002) while the differences with Others were not statistically significant. Also according to non-parametric tests, the differences between groups were not statistically significant for *ideological secularism* (H (2)=4.003, *p*=.14).

Finally, concerning *establishment*, in the Croatian sample, a Kruskal-Wallis test found that all the differences between the groups were statistically significant (H (2)=118.49, *p*<.001). Then, the pairwise comparisons showed that there were statistically significant differences between No Religion and Catholics (*p*<.001) and between Other and Catholics (p=.002) while there were not between No Religion and Others.

Political orientations

- *Italy*

To assess the differences among respondents more to the left and more to the right, we recoded the 10-point scale of political orientation and summarised the responses into three categories:

Left (points 1 to 4), Centre (points 5 and 6), and Right (points 7 to 10). The results should be read with caution. However, we believe they can give an indication of the relationship between political groups and secularism and establishment.

For the Italian sample, by analysing the descriptive statistics of the different political orientations for each of the three independent variables (Tab. 5.14), it was possible to note that the average mean values for *institutional secularism* decreased from a left-wing orientation (M=4.21, SD=0.03) to a right-wing orientation (M=3.79, SD=0.09). The opposite was true for the *establishment*: on average, those with a left-wing orientation tended to have the lowest score (M=1.54, SD=0.03), while those with a right-wing orientation scored the highest (M=2.33, SD=0.11).

As with establishment, also for *ideological secularism*, the lowest average score was found in those who were oriented towards the left (M=2.79, SD=0.05) but in this case, it was those with a centre orientation who had the highest average score (M=2.99, SD=0.06), albeit only slightly higher than those who were oriented towards the right (M=2.94, SD=0.11).

Tab.5.14

Average means of institutional and ideological secularism, and establishment by political groups (Italy)

	N	M	SD	SD Err.
Institutional Secularism				
Left	376	4.21	0.03	0.67
Center	160	4.07	0.05	0.64
Right	68	3.79	0.09	0.71
Total	604	4.12	0.68	0.03
Ideological Secularism				
Left	380	2.79	0.05	0.93
Center	159	2.99	0.06	0.79
Right	67	2.94	0.11	0.92
Total	606	2.86	0.90	0.04
Establishment				
Left	381	1.54	0.03	0.68
Center	162	2.23	0.07	0.89
Right	67	2.33	0.11	0.89
Total	610	1.81	0.84	0.03

To test the hypothesis that the mean scores in the different political orientation categories were statistically different from each other regarding *institutional* and *ideological secularism* and *establishment*, three one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. In all three models, the independent variable consisted of the three different categories of political orientation: 1) Left; 2) Centre; and 3) Right. The dependent variables, on the other hand, varied for each model and consisted of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*.

To assess the normality of the distributions of the dependent variables, indicative of the power attributable to the parametric ANOVA tests, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used, which showed the absence of distributional normality (*p* ranging from <.001 to .018) except for the distribution of ideological secularism in the right group (*p*=.061).

For this reason, to test the robustness of the results of the significance tests, it was decided to combine the parametric analyses with the corresponding non-parametric tests.

Among parametric tests, Levene' test of equality of variances between groups was conducted first. Based on the results that emerged for *institutional secularism*, which found that the homogeneity of variance assumption had been violated (*p*=.39), the classic Fisher's ANOVA was calculated. For *ideological secularism* and *establishment*, by contrast, Welch's ANOVA was run as the groups were found to be heterogeneous in terms of variability (for *ideological secularism*, *p*<.001; for *establishment*, *p*<.001).

The classic one-way ANOVA test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the average means of *institutional secularism* according to the political orientation groupings F $(2,601)$ = 11.842, *p*<.001. Therefore, it was possible to reject the null hypothesis that there was no difference in mean scores on this variable between those with a political orientation to the left rather than to the centre or to the right.

Using Tukey's HSD test, post-hoc comparisons were conducted to determine which pairs of the three political orientation groups' means differed significantly on *institutional secularism*. Those with a right-wing orientation differed statistically significantly from those with a centre (*p*=.011) or left-wing orientation (*p*<.001). In contrast, the difference between the mean scores of the centre and left was not statistically significant (*p*=.08) (Fig.5.11).

Fig. 5.11

Differences among political groups on institutional secularism's support (Italy)
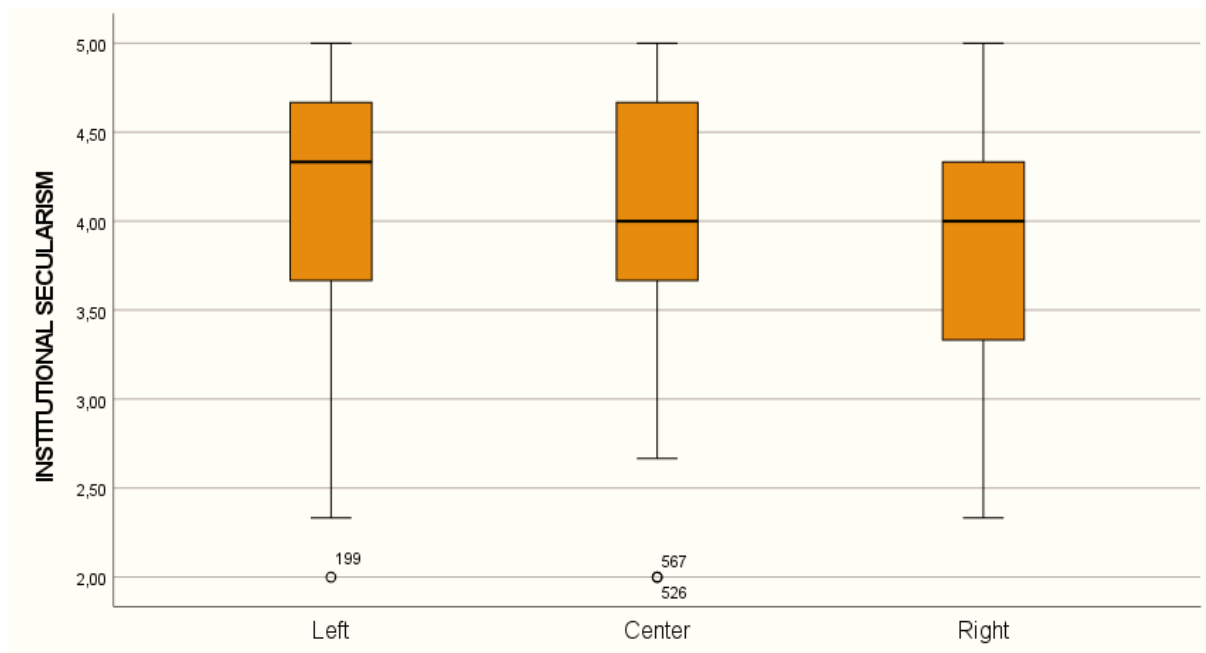
Welch's one-way ANOVA test then showed that there were also statistically significant differences between the mean scores for *ideological secularism*, Welch's F (2,171.150) = 3.615, p=.029, and *establishment*, Welch's F (2, 154.205) = 55.871, *p*<.001, according to the political orientation groupings. Therefore, even for these variables, it was possible to reject the null hypothesis that there was no difference in average means between those with a political orientation to the left rather than to the centre or the right.

Using the Games-Howell procedure, post-hoc comparisons were conducted to determine which pairs of the three political orientation groups' means differed significantly on *ideological secularism* and *establishment*. Regarding *ideological secularism*, the only statistically significant difference was found between those with a left-wing orientation and those oriented toward the centre (p=.025). In contrast, the differences with the right-wing mean scores were not statistically significant (Fig.5.12).

Fig. 5.12

Differences among political groups on ideological secularism's support (Italy)
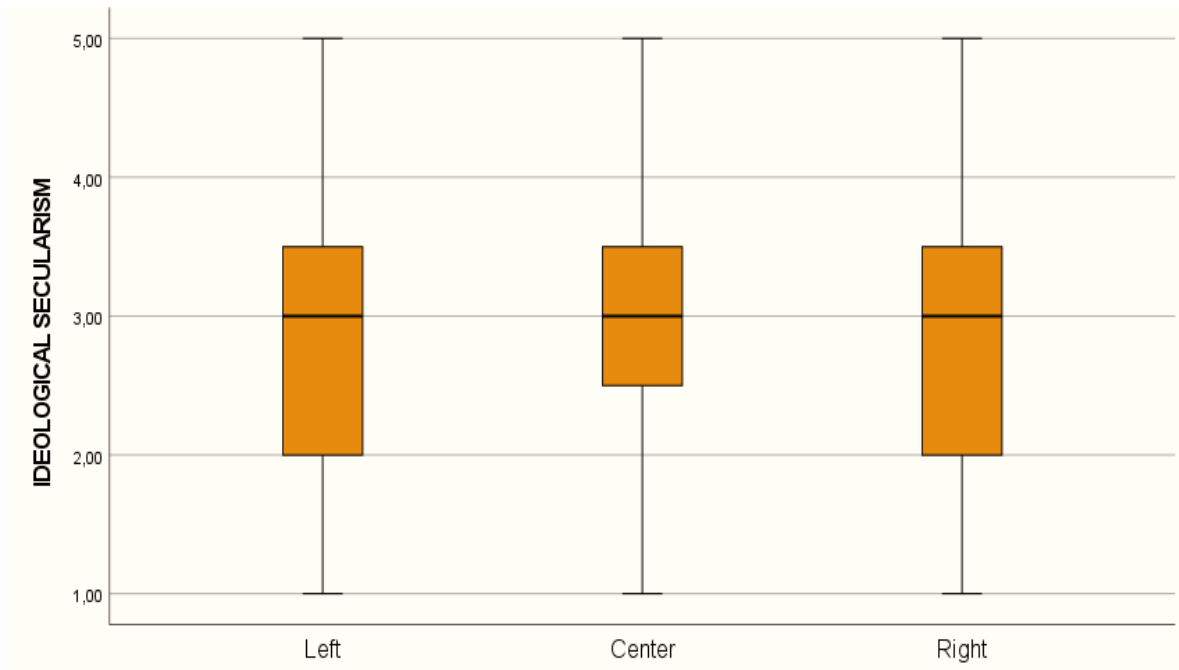
On the other hand, in the case of *establishment*, those with a left-wing political orientation differed statistically significantly from both those with centre orientation ($p<.001$) and those with a right-wing orientation ($p<.001$). In contrast, the difference between centre and right-wing mean scores was not statistically significant ($p=.72$) (Fig.5.13).

Fig. 5.13

Differences among political groups on establishment's support (Italy)
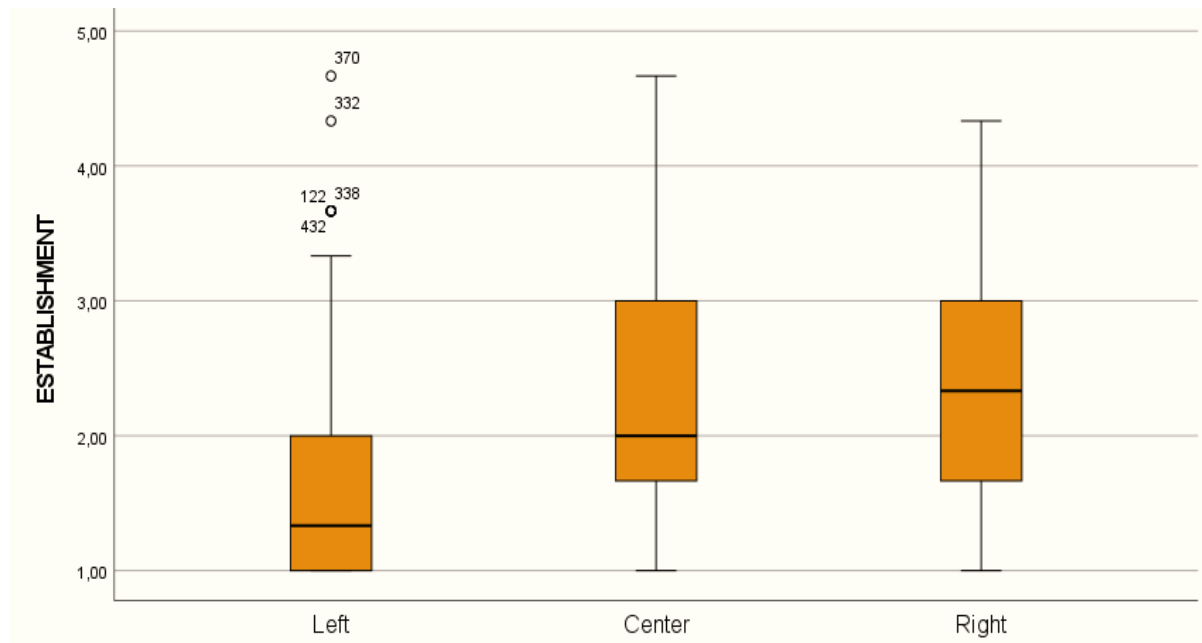
The nonparametric tests confirmed what the parametric analyses showed, except for institutional secularism (H(2)=22.457, p<.001) where it emerged that the difference between left and centre was also statistically significant (p=.05).

Consistent with the parametric analysis, the differences between right and centre (p=.04) and between right and left (p<.001) were statistically significant.

For ideological secularism (H(2)=6.923; p=0.031), from the pairwise comparisons, the difference between left and centre was found statistically significant (p=.03) while the other two differences were not.

With regard to establishment (H (2)=107.241, p<.001), from the pairwise comparisons, it emerged that those with a left orientation differed statistically significantly from both those with a centre (p<.001) and right orientation (p<.001) while the difference between centre and right was not found statistically significant.

Croatia

In the case of Croatia, in analysing the descriptive statistics of the different political orientations for each of the three independent variables (Tab. 5.15), it was possible to note that *institutional secularism* average mean values decreased going from left-wing orientation (M=4.07; SD=0.05) to right-wing orientation (M=3.69; SD=0.08). The same trend was also recorded for *ideological secularism*, in which the highest mean score was found in those oriented towards the left (M=2.96, SD=0.06) and the lowest score in those oriented towards the right (M=2.87,

SD=0.87). The opposite was true for *establishment*: those with a left-wing orientation tended on average to have the lower score (M=2.21, SD=0.07), while those more oriented toward the right wing had the highest score (M=3.18, SD=0.09).

Tab.5.15

Average means of institutional and ideological secularism, and establishment by political groups (Croatia)

	N	M	SD	SD Err.
Institutional Secularism				
Left	193	4.07	0,05	0.67
Center	233	3.96	0.04	0.66
Right	101	3.69	0.08	0.83
Total	527	3.95	0.71	0.03
Ideological Secularism				
Left	193	2.96	0.06	0.89
Center	233	2.88	0.05	0.82
Right	101	2.70	0.09	0.94
Total	527	2.87	0.87	0.04
Establishment				
Left	193	2.21	0.07	0.96
Center	233	2.69	0.06	0.87
Right	101	3.18	0.09	0.90
Total	527	2.61	0.98	0.04

To test the hypothesis that the average means in the different political orientation categories were statistically different regarding *institutional* and *ideological secularism* and *establishment*, three one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. In all three models, the independent variable consists of the three different categories of political orientation: 1) Left; 2) Centre; and 3) Right. The dependent variables, on the other hand, varied for each model and consisted of *institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*.

To assess the normality of the distributions of the dependent variables, indicative of the power attributable to the parametric ANOVA tests, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used, which showed

the absence of distributional normality (p ranging between <.001 and .004) except for the *establishment* distribution in the Right group (p=.090).

For this reason, to test the robustness of the results of the significance tests, it was decided to combine the parametric analyses with the non-parametric ones.

Regarding the parametric tests, Levene's test of equality of variances between groups was conducted first. Since the groups were found to be heterogeneous in terms of variability, Welch's ANOVA was calculated for all three independent variables.

Welch's ANOVA test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the average means of *institutional secularism* according to the political orientation groupings, Welch's F (2, 249.936) = 7.963, p<.001. Therefore, it was possible to reject the null hypothesis that there was also no difference in average means between those with a political orientation to the left rather than to the centre or the right.

Games-Howell nonparametric post-hoc tests were conducted to determine which pairs of the three political orientation groups' means differed significantly on *institutional secularism*. Those with a right-wing orientation differed statistically significantly from those with a centre (p=.005) or left-wing orientation (p<.001). In contrast, the difference between the average means for the centre and left was not statistically significant (p=.17) (Fig.5.14).

Fig. 5.14

Differences among political groups on institutional secularism's support (Croatia)
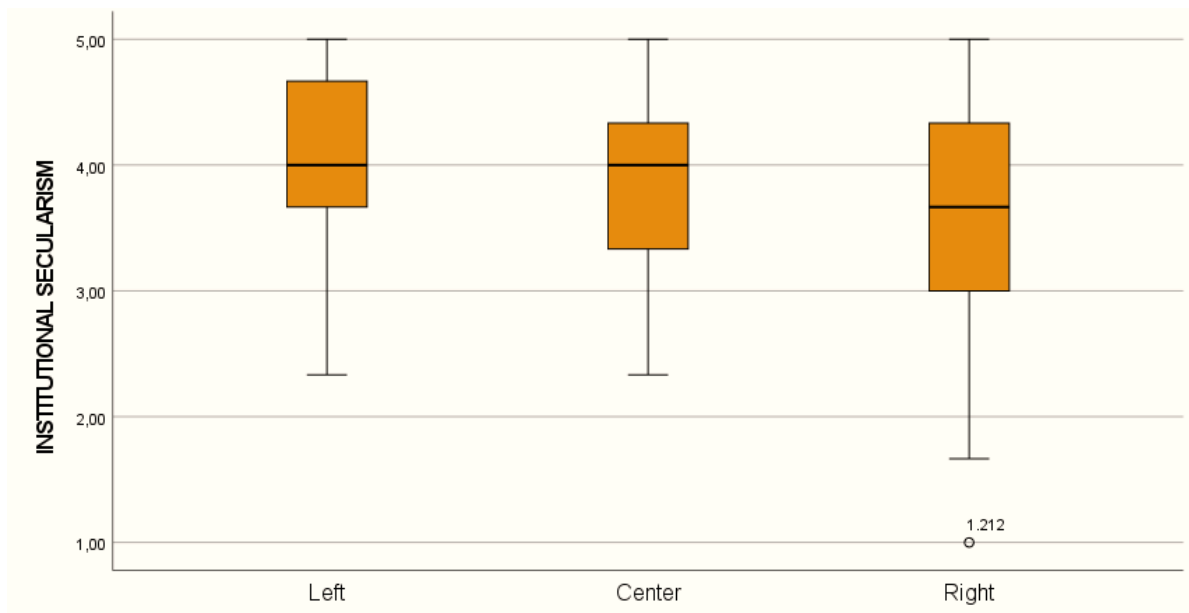

As far as *ideological secularism* was concerned, no statistically significant differences were found among the different political orientation groups, Welch's F (2, 257.431) = 2.611, *p*=.075. By contrast, statistically significant differences between the different political orientation groupings emerged in the case of *establishment*, Welch's F (2,266.070) = 37.668, p<.001. Therefore, it was possible to reject the null hypothesis that there were no differences in *establishment* average means between those with a political orientation to the left rather than to the centre or the right.

Post-hoc comparisons, using the Games-Howell correction, were conducted to determine which pairs of the three political orientation groups' means differed significantly on *establishment*. All differences were found to be statistically significant (*p*<.001): the mean scores of those on the left differed statistically significantly from those in the centre and those on the right, and the latter also differed statistically significantly from those in the centre (Fig.5.15).

Fig. 5.15

Differences among political groups on establishment's support (Croatia)
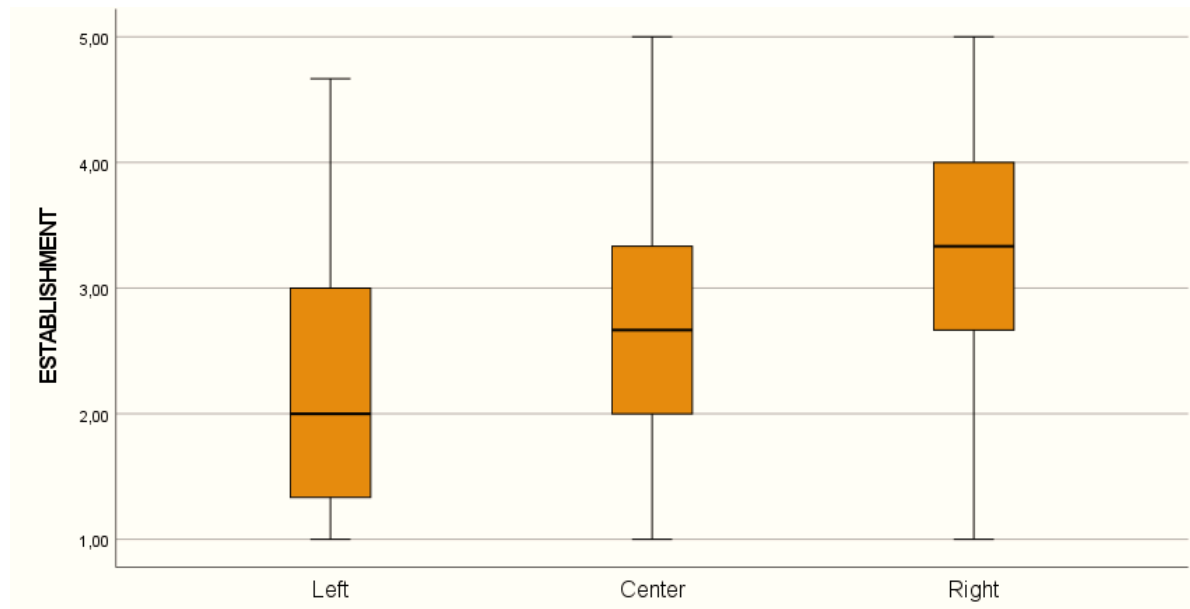
Nonparametric tests confirmed what the parametric analyses showed. For *institutional secularism*, statistically significant differences among the groups emerged from the Kruskal-Wallis test, H(2)=15.006, *p*<.001. The pairwise comparisons showed that those who supported the right and the left (*p*<.001) significantly differed between the two of them, while those who held centre orientation did not.

Also for *establishment* there appeared to be statistically significant differences between groups (H(2)=65.859, *p*<.001) and from the pairwise comparisons it resulted that all differences between groups were statistically significant (*p*<.001).

In contrast, for *ideological secularism* no statistically significant differences between groups were found, H(2)=3.748, *p*=.154.

5.6 Testing the impact of secularism and establishment on religious freedom

In this last section, we will report, first, the results of the correlation tests that we computed between independent and dependent variables; second, the outcomes of the regression analysis that we have performed to assess the impact of our control and independent variables on the three dimensions of religious freedom.

5.6.1 Correlations

Before proceeding with regression analysis, Pearson correlations were computed to assess whether there were statistically significant relationships between the independent variables (*institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*) and the dependent variables (*Rf as societal value*, *Rf as individual value*, and *Rf as freedom to express religion*) of our conceptual model. We used an alpha level of .05 for all statistical tests.

Looking at the two tables (Tab. 5.16 and Tab. 5.17) showing the results of the correlations between independent and dependent variables, it can be seen that *institutional secularism* and *ideological secularism* were significantly correlated with all the three dimensions of religious freedom.

Tab.5.16

Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients independent and dependent variables (Italy)

	Rf societal value	Rf indiv. value	Rf fr. to expr. rel.
Instit. secularism	.201[**]	-.279[**]	-.339[**]
Id. secularism	-.88[**]	-.189[**]	-.237[**]
Establishment	-.251[**]	-.043	-.036

Notes. **$p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed); *$p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed); Inst. secularism = institutional secularism; Id. secularism = ideological secularism; Rf indiv. value = Rf individual value; Rf fr.to expr. rel. = Rf freedom to express religion

Tab.5.17

Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients independent and dependent variables (Croatia)

	Rf societal value	Rf indiv. value	Rf fr. to expr. rel.
Instit. secularism	.294[**]	-.039[*]	-.257[**]
Id. secularism	.209[**]	-.106[**]	.134[**]
Establishment	.230[**]	-.225[**]	.109**

Notes. **$p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed); *$p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed); Inst. secularism = institutional secularism; Id. secularism = ideological secularism; Rf indiv.value = Rf individual value; Rf freed.to expr. rel. = Rf freedom to express religion

In both samples, the relationship between *institutional secularism* and all three dimensions of Rf was positive, moderate in strength, and statistically significant ($p<.001$). This means that the more Italian and Croatian students endorsed *institutional secularism*, the more they supported Rf in all its three dimensions.

The opposite was true for *ideological secularism*. In this case, relationships with all dimensions of Rf were negative. In both samples, the correlation between *ideological secularism* and *Rf as societal value* was strong and statistically significant (for Italy, $r=-.88$, $p< .05$; for Croatia, $r=-.209$, $p< .05$), while the correlation between the same variable and the other two dimensions of religious freedom, although statistically significant ($p<.001$), was weak (Pearson's r between .11 and .24). This means that the more students of the two samples endorsed the variable, the less they supported Rf in all its three dimensions.

In the case of *establishment*, by contrast, we observed different outcomes between Italy and Croatia.

In the Italian sample, Pearson correlation coefficients revealed a statistically significant relationship only between *establishment* and *Rf as a societal value*. In this case, the correlation was negative, weak in strength, and statistically significant, $r=-.251$, $p<.001$. The more Italian students supported *establishment*, the less they endorsed *Rf as a societal value*. By contrast, no significant correlations were recorded between the same variable and the other two dimensions of religious freedom—*Rf as individual value* and *Rf as freedom to express religion*—although the negative sign of the relationship in both cases should be noted.

Very different was the case of Croatia, where the *establishment* variable was significantly correlated with all the dependent variables. In this case, as it was for Italy, Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a weak negative relationship between the *establishment* and *Rf as a societal value*, $r=-.257$, $p<.001$. The more Croatian students supported *establishment*, the less they endorsed *Rf as a societal value*. However, *establishment* was found significantly positively correlated with the other two variables (for Rf as individual value, $r=.134$, $p<.001$; for *Rf as freedom to express religion*, $r=.109$, $p<.001$). This means that the more Croatian respondents were in favour of establishment, the more they agreed with *Rf as individual value* and *Rf as freedom to express religion*.

5.6.2 Regression Analysis

In order to evaluate the impact of the three independent variables (*institutional secularism*, *ideological secularism*, and *establishment*) on the three dimensions of religious freedom (*Rf as societal value*, *Rf as individual value*, *Rf as freedom to express religion*), three generalised hierarchical linear regression models were constructed with robust estimates of the standard errors, in order to limit the heteroskedasticity of the residuals due to the negative asymmetry in the constructs.

Each of these models explores, in the first block, the relationship between the control variables and the three constructs relating to religious freedom and, in the second block, the effect of also including the independent variables as regressors. We hypothesized that: 1) *institutional secularism* had a positive impact on all three dimensions of religious freedom; 2) *ideological secularism* had a positive impact on religious freedom as individual value, but a negative on the other two; and 3) *establishment* had a negative impact on all three dimensions of religious freedom.

With regard to the categorical control variables, for Sex 'female' was taken as the reference category, for Religious Affiliation 'Catholics', and for Political Orientation 'Right'.

All models had a statistically significant F-index value ($p<.05$) and it was therefore possible to proceed to the analysis of the individual regression coefficients, which are presented later in the chapter. In addition to the value of the coefficient b, the values of its significance (p-value) and the robust estimate of the standard error were also reported.

Overall, the full models showed reduced predictive power, as the values of the corrected coefficient of determination R^2 were all lower than 20% for both countries. In other words, less than 20% of the overall variance of the response variable was explained by the independent and control variables included in the single linear regression models. Specifically, the full model with *Rf as a societal value* as the dependent variable turned out to have an Adjusted R-square value of .125 for Italy and .122 for Croatia. The full model referring to *Rf as an individual value* has an Adjusted R-square value of .101 for Italy and .116 for Croatia. Finally, the complete model referring to *Rf as freedom to express religion* has an adjusted R-square of .157 for Italy and .153 for Croatia. As can be seen from these coefficients, this last component of religious freedom was the one best explained (about 15%) by the regressors included in the complete models for both countries.

Looking at the reduced regression models for *Rf as a societal value* (Tab. 5.18 and Tab. 5.19), in the case of Italy (Tab. 5.18), one may see that three of the predictors were significantly correlated with the variable: *political orientation*, *religious affiliation*, and *religiosity*. First, results showed that the more respondents tended towards the Right, the less they supported *Rf as a societal value* (B=-.05, $p<.001$). Second, compared to belonging to the groups of Catholics,

belonging to No Religion significantly increased the support for *Rf as a societal value* (B=.10, *p*=.01). Third, the level of *religiosity* significantly affected the support for *Rf as a societal value*: higher levels of *religiosity* positively predicted higher levels of support for the variable (B=.04, p=.01).

For the Croatian sample (Tab. 5.19), by contrast, *religiosity* and *political inclusion* were the variables that significantly impacted *Rf as a societal value*. In the former case, the impact was negative, meaning that the more respondents were religious, the less they supported the variable (B=-.06, p=.03). In the latter, the sign of the relationship was positive: *political inclusion* increased the support for *Rf as a societal value* (B=.07, *p*=0.01).

Concerning the reduced models for *Rf as individual value*, in Italy (Tab. 5.20), there were two control variables that significantly predicted the dependent variable: *political orientation* and *religiosity*. In the first case, the more respondents tended towards the right side of the political spectrum, the less they supported *Rf as an individual value* (B=-.05, p= .01). In the second case, higher levels of *religiosity* turned out to be positively correlated to higher levels of support of *Rf as an individual value* (B=.13, *p*<.001).

In Croatia too, higher levels of *political inclusion* and *religiosity* corresponded to higher levels of support for *Rf as an individual value* (for *political inclusion* B=.06, *p*=.05; for *religiosity*, B=.08, *p*=.004).

Finally, looking at the outcomes of the reduced regression model *Rf as freedom to express religion*, one may see that in the case of the Italian sample (Tab. 5.22) only *political orientation* was significantly correlated to the variable: tending towards the right of the spectrum decreased the support for the variable (B=-.07, *p*<.001).

In the case of Croatian sample (Tab. 5.23), by contrast, it was found that *religiosity* was the variable's predictor: higher levels of *religiosity* predicted higher levels of the support of *Rf as an individual value* (for *religiosity*, B=.11, *p*<.001).

RF AS A SOCIETAL VALUE (Reduced regression models)

Tab. 5.18

Reduced regression model for Rf as societal value (Italy)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	4.9	.09	<.001	4.8	5.1
Sex_Male	-.01	.03	.78	-.08	.06
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.10**	.04	.01	.03	.16
Rel. Affiliation_Others	-.15	.10	.13	-.34	.04
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.05***	.01	<.001	-.08	-.03
Religiosity	.04**	.02	.01	.01	.07
Political Inclusion	-.01	.02	.36	-.04	.02

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

Tab. 5.19

Reduced regression model for Rf as societal value (Croatia)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	4.72	.15	<.001	4.44	5.00
Sex_Male	-.10	.07	.15	-.24	.04
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.02	.07	.78	-.12	.17
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.02	.28	.95	-.53	.57
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.03	.02	.06	-.07	.001
Religiosity	-.06*	.03	.03	-.12	-.01
Political Inclusion	.07**	.03	.01	.02	.12

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001*

RF AS INDIVIDUAL VALUE (Reduced regression models)

Tab. 5.20

Reduced regression model for Rf as individual value (Italy)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	3.63	.18	<.001	3.28	3.99
Sex_Male	-.09	.08	.23	-.24	.06
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.10	.08	.23	-.06	.25
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.001	.12	.99	-.24	.24
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.05**	.02	.01	-.09	-.01
Religiosity	.13***	.03	<.001	.07	.19
Political Inclusion	.07*	.03	.04	.004	.13

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

Tab. 5.21

Reduced regression model for Rf as individual value (Croatia)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	3.64	.13	<.001	3.38	3.90
Sex_Male	.01	.07	.94	-.14	.15
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	-.06	.10	.53	-.26	.14
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.05	.16	.77	-.27	.37
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.01	.02	.40	-.04	.02
Religiosity	.08**	.03	.004	.03	.13
Political Inclusion	.06*	.03	.05	-.001	.12

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

RF AS FREEDOM TO EXPRESS RELIGION (Reduced regression models)

Tab. 5.22

Reduced regression model for Rf as freedom to express religion (Italy)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	4.32	.17	<.001	3.98	4.65
Sex_Male	-.07	.07	.30	-.20	.06
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.06	.08	.47	-.10	.21
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.13	.12	.27	-.10	.37
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.07***	.02	<.001	-.11	-.03
Religiosity	.05	.03	.08	-.01	.10
Political Inclusion	-.02	.03	.60	-.08	.05

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

Tab. 5.23

Reduced regression model for Rf as freedom to express religion (Croatia)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	3.58	.15	<.001	3.28	3.89
Sex_Male	-.08	.09	.37	-.26	.10
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	-.08	.12	.50	-.33	.16
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.41	.24	.08	-.06	.88
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.02	.02	.37	-.05	.02
Religiosity	.11***	.03	<.001	.05	.18
Political Inclusion	.02	.04	.64	-.05	.09

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

Looking at the full models (pp. 180-185) it is possible to see that, in many cases, in Italy as well as in Croatia, the behaviours of control variables changed.

In the case of *Rf as a societal value*, in Italy (Tab. 5.24), compared to the reduced model, *religious affiliation* showed itself not to be more significantly correlated to the variable. By contrast, *political orientation* still negatively impacted the variable, while *religiosity* positively impacted it (for *political orientation* B=-.04, *p*=.001; for religiosity, B=.04, *p*=.02). In Croatia, by contrast, no control variable was found significantly correlated with the dependent variable.

In Italy, in the full model built for *Rf as individual value* (Tab. 5.26), unlike the reduced one, *political orientation* turned out to be no longer significantly correlated to the variable. By contrast, *religiosity* was still significantly correlated (B=.11, *p*<.001). In Croatia, too, religiosity continued to have a significant and positive effect on the dependent variable (B=.07; *p*=.02), while political inclusion did not.

Finally, regarding the full model for *Rf as freedom to express religion*, we see that in Italy (Tab. 5.28) only *political orientation* continued to have a significant and negative effect on the dependent variable (B=-.06, *p*=.004). while in Croatia *religiosity* and the religious group of Others turned out to positively impact the variable (*religiosity* B=.07, *p*=.03; Others, B=.45, *p*=.04).

To conclude, we need to examine the effects of the three independent variables on the three dimensions of religious freedom.

Concerning *institutional secularism*, it is possible to see that both in Italy (Tab. 5.24, 5.26, 5.28) and in Croatia (Tab. 5.25, 5.27, 5.29), it is significantly and positively correlated to all the three dependent variables. In the case of both Italian and Croatian students, endorsing the model of institutional secularism increased the support for *Rf as a societal value* (for Italy, B=.07, *p*=.002; for Croatia, B=.23, *p*=<.001), *Rf as individual value* (for Italy, B=.27, *p*=<.001; for Croatia, B=.24, *p*=<.001), and *Rf as freedom to express religion* (B=.30, *p*=<.001; for Croatia, B=.30, *p*=<.001).

Ideological secularism was found never to be correlated with the dependent variables, except for *Rf as freedom to express religion*. In this case, both in Italy (Tab. 5.28) and in Croatia (Tab.5.29), it was significantly negatively correlated with the variable: endorsing *ideological secularism* negatively affected the support for the public expression of religion (for Italy, B=-.13, *p*=<.001; for Croatia, B=-.19, *p*=<.001).

Finally, as was the case with Pearson correlations, *establishment* gave different outcomes in Italy and in Croatia. In Italy, it was found to be significantly correlated only with *Rf as a societal value*. The sign of the coefficient was negative, indicating that the endorsement of *establishment* decreased the support for the variable (B=-.07, *p*=.01). In Croatia, by contrast, it

was found significantly correlated with all the dependent variables. As in Italy, in the case of *Rf as societal value* the correlation was negative (B=-.11, *p*=.01). By contrast, in the case of the other two variables correlation was positive: endorsing *establishment* increased support for *Rf as individual value* (B=.12, *p*=.004) and *Rf as freedom to express religion* (B=.14, *p*=.003).

Tab. 5.24

Full regression model for Rf as societal value (Italy)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	4.77	.18	<.001	4.42	5.13
Sex_Male	.01	.04	.81	-.06	.08
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.07	.04	.09	-.01	.14
Rel. Affiliation_Others	-.16	.11	.13	-.36	.05
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.04**	.01	.001	-.06	-.02
Religiosity	.04**	.02	.02	.01	.07
Political Inclusion	-.02	.02	.15	-.05	.01
Institutional Secularism	.07**	.02	.002	.03	.12
Ideological Secularism	-.01	.02	.54	-.04	.02
Establishment	-.07**	.03	.01	-.12	-.02

Notes. $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Tab. 5.25

Full regression model for Rf as a societal value (Croatia)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	4.11	.26	<.001	3.59	4.63
Sex_Male	-.02	.08	.76	-.17	.12
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	-.08	.07	.24	-.23	.06
Rel. Affiliation_Others	-.09	.30	.78	-.68	.51
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.01	.02	.41	-.05	.02
Religiosity	-.04	.03	.15	-.10	.02
Political Inclusion	.03	.03	.24	-.02	.08
Institutional Secularism	.23***	.04	<.001	.15	.30
Ideological Secularism	-.01	.04	.80	-.08	.06
Establishment	-.11**	.04	.01	-.19	-.03

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

RF AS INDIVIDUAL VALUE (Full regression models)

Tab. 5.26

Full regression model for Rf as individual value (Italy)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	2.67	.38	<.001	1.92	3.43
Sex_Male	-.03	.07	.70	-.18	.12
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.10	.08	.21	-.06	.26
Rel. Affiliation_Others	-.03	.13	.80	-.28	.22
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.04	.02	.07	-.09	.004
Religiosity	.11***	.03	<.001	.05	.17
Political Inclusion	.06	.03	.08	-.01	.13
Institutional Secularism	.27***	.06	<.001	.16	.39
Ideological Secularism	-.07	.04	.08	-.15	.008
Establishment	.02	.05	.76	-.08	.11

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001*

Tab. 5.27

Full regression model for Rf as individual value (Croatia)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	2.66	.27	<.001	2.13	3.19
Sex_Male	.10	.07	.15	-.04	.25
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.03	.10	.80	-.18	.23
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.09	.16	.58	-.23	.41
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.01	.01	.47	-.04	.02
Religiosity	.07**	.03	.02	.01	.12
Political Inclusion	.04	.03	.18	-.02	.10
Institutional Secularism	.24***	.05	<.001	.15	.32
Ideological Secularism	-.07	.04	.07	-.15	.01
Establishment	.12**	.04	.004	.04	.20

Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

RF AS FREEDOM TO EXPRESS RELIGION (Full regression models)

Tab. 5.28

Full regression model for Rf as freedom to express religion (Italy)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Intercept	3,47	.33	<.001	2.83	4.11
Sex_Male	-.01	.06	.93	-.13	.12
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	.10	.08	.19	-.05	.25
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.15	.11	.16	-.06	.36
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.06*	.02	.004	-.09	-.02
Religiosity	.01	.03	.81	-.05	.06
Political Inclusion	-.05	.03	.10	-.11	.01
Institutional Secularism	.30***	.05	<.001	.20	.40
Ideological Secularism	-.13***	.04	<.001	-.20	-.06
Establishment	.07	.04	.10	-.01	.14

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

Tab. 5.29

Full regression model for Rf as freedom to express religion (Croatia)

Parameter	B	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	**Upper**
Intercept	2.79	.31	<.001	2.18	3.39
Sex_Male	.01	.09	.94	-.17	.18
Sex_Female	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Rel. Affiliation_No Religion	-.05	.13	.71	-.29	.20
Rel. Affiliation_Others	.45[*]	.21	.04	.03	.87
Rel. Affiliation_Catholics	0[b]	.	.	.	.
Political Orientation	-.02	.02	.22	-.06	.01
Religiosity	.07[*]	.03	.03	.01	.14
Political Inclusion	-.01	.04	.86	-.08	.07
Institutional Secularism	.30[***]	.05	<.001	.20	.40
Ideological Secularism	-.19[***]	.05	<.001	-.29	-.10
Establishment	.14[*]	.05	.003	.05	.23

*Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*

Conclusions

This chapter reported the results of the statistical analysis we performed on the data collected from university students, at the Universities of Padua and Zagreb, between September 2021 and January 2022.

The analysis was conducted to achieve four main research objectives: 1) to compare social perceptions of religious freedom in Italy and in Croatia, 2) to compare the opinions on institutional secularism, ideological secularism, and establishment in the two samples, 3) to assess the effect of religious and political identities on the support of the three models of religion and politics relations, and 4) to test the impact of institutional secularism, ideological secularism, and establishment on the three dimensions of religious freedom (societal, individual, practices). Some interesting findings emerged that showed the relevance of the research questions and the importance of answering them comparatively.

First, with regard to the first objective, we found that although Italian university students supported the ideas of religious freedom as a societal value and as the right to disseminate and express publicly religious convictions more than Croatian ones, Croatians were more in favour of religious freedom as individual value.

Second, findings revealed differences between Italians and Croats in their attitudes toward the three models of institutional secularism, ideological secularism, and establishment. Although no statistical difference was found between Italians' and Croats' support of ideological secularism, t-test showed that Italians favoured more than Croats institutional secularism, while Croats endorsed establishment more than Italians did.

Third, results revealed that religious and political identities matter for the attitudes towards the three independent variables. Catholics, non-religious, and students that belonged to religious minorities differed in their support of the three models, as was also the case for respondents holding different political views.

Finally, we hypothesized that: 1) institutional secularism had a positive impact on all three dimensions of religious freedom; 2) ideological secularism had a positive impact on religious freedom as individual value, but a negative on the other two; 3) establishment had a negative impact on all three dimensions of religious freedom. Regression analysis findings showed that although institutional secularism positively impacted all three dimensions of religious freedom in both Italy and Croatia, ideological secularism had a statistically significant negative effect only on Rf as freedom to express religion in both countries. The case of establishment was different: although in both Italy and Croatia it negatively impacted Rf as a societal value, in Italy it was not significantly correlated to any other dependent variable, while in Croatia it was significantly and positively correlated with the other two.

We will discuss the empirical, theoretical and practical implications of these results in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Does Political Secularism Matter for Religious Freedom?
Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

Drawing on the sociology of religious freedom and theoretical and empirical inquiries into secularism, this research project aimed to assess how the endorsement of different models of political secularism influences social perceptions of religious freedom in two European Catholic countries, Italy and Croatia. To respond to this question, we designed a cross-national survey that involved 1,317 young students affiliated with the Universities of Padua and Zagreb between September 2021 and January 2022[30].

We made two initial assumptions: first, we argued that 'secularism is *not* one thing' (Beard et al., 2013, p.14), but political secularism is at least 'two' (Casanova, 2009), thus distinguishing between its moderate and more ideological forms. Second, we held that religious freedom is a multidimensional and socially constructed concept whose meaning changes depending on individual characteristics and structural features of different contexts (Breskaya & Giordan, 2019).

The findings broadly assessed the strong predictive ability of political secularism (especially of the *institutional* model) on the meaning of religious freedom, and validated the hypothesis that it is necessary to consider political secularism's multiple 'facets' in order to fully understand its influence on the societal and individual support of religious freedom in different countries.

Moreover, our findings highlight the complex interplay among religious freedom, political orientations, sociological aspects of religion, and Italy and Croatia's socio-religious features, confirming further the idea that 'religious liberty is not a single, stable principle existing outside

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[30] We are aware of the limitations that a convenience sample poses to the generalisation of the results of inferential statistics. We would therefore like to specify that when we use terms such as 'Italian students' and 'Croatian students', or 'Italy' and 'Croatia' when presenting results, we always do so with reference to the reference sample only.

of history or spatial geographies but is an inescapable context-bound, polyvalent concept unfolding within divergent histories in differing political orders' (Sullivan et al., 2015, p. 5). Finally, they also shed light on the model of *establishment* and on how perceptions of it vary in countries with different historical legacies and models of majority-minority relations.

This chapter will present this study's results. It is organised according to our four research objectives: 1) to compare religious freedom social perceptions in Italy and Croatia; 2) to compare attitudes towards *institutional* and *ideological* secularism and *establishment* models in the two countries; 3) to assess the impact of religious identities and political orientations; and 4) to assess the impact of the two secularist models and establishment on religious freedom. First, we present and comment on the main findings based on the hypothesis and theories highlighted in the first two chapters for every objective. Second, we describe this research project's limitations and suggest further research. Finally, we draw some general conclusions, hoping our insights will benefit future scholarly works.

6.1 Social Perceptions of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia

Based on the political and religious histories of the two countries, we expected that the Italian respondents would more strongly endorse all three dimensions of religious freedom compared to Croatian ones. The results partially confirmed this hypothesis. We discovered that, while Italians endorsed religious freedom as a 'societal value' and as 'freedom to express religion' more than Croatians did, Croats showed more support than Italians did for religious freedom as an 'individual value' linked to the protection of human freedom to cultivate one's spirituality and to search for one's truth.

In discussing the similarities and differences between Italy and Croatia, we focused on their institutional arrangements of secularism and religious freedom and on majority-minority relations. As we saw in Chapter 3, Italy and Croatia are majoritarian Catholic countries with similar institutional features. Both countries have a concordatarian model of church-state relations (Martino, 2014) and a moderate level of discrimination against religious minorities by the government (Finke et al., 2018). However, they diverge at the social level in terms of both their religious demography's composition and types of pluralism and inter-religious relations. Italy exhibits a higher level of religious diversity (also reflected in our sample's composition), a more consolidated pattern of religious pluralism, and longer-standing practices of interreligious dialogue. In contrast, after the fall of socialist Yugoslavia and the 90s war, Croatia turned into a highly religiously homogeneous country, with inter-religious relations

marked by divisions and conflicts, such that Fox et al. (2018) placed it ʿnear the top of countries in scores of societal discriminationsʾ against religious minorities (p. 20).

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. However, based on the theories and hypotheses reported in the literature review, we suggest that these socio-religious differences might partly explain the discrepancy between some of the results obtained on the two samples. In particular, we rely on those studies that showed the importance of both 'types and degrees of pluralism' (Richardson, 2006)[31] and the level of discrimination against religious minorities (Finke & Martin, 2014)[32] to predict implementation of or restrictions on religious freedom in different contexts. We suggest that both of these theories are possible candidates to explain at least the differences in scores that we have observed on the two of our three dimensions of religious freedom that most explicitly appeal to minorities—that is, the "societal" dimension and that referred to as "freedom to express religion". It must be stressed that both Richardson's and Finke and Martin's theories refer to governments. However, the compatibility between them and our findings allows us to infer that they are also valid when this relationship is expressed at the level of society, suggesting further comparative research on this interplay[33].

Other relevant information about how religious freedom is perceived among Italians and Croats comes from the three reduced regression models which we built to assess the impact of the control variables[34] on the dimensions of religious freedom (par. 5.6.2). Their outcomes shed light on the intertwining of religious freedom, political and religious identities, and the way they vary across the two countries, thus strengthening the idea that religious freedom is 'a complex concept that holds many implications for subjective experiences and public life' (Breskaya et al., 2021, p. 280).

First, in Italy, we observed the sensitivity of all aspects of religious freedom to political orientation. The more respondents tended towards the left, the more they endorsed the societal, individual, and public meaning of freedom of religion. On the contrary, in Croatia, except for

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[31] See par. 1.4.

[32] See par. 1.5.

[33] It is worth noticing the overlapping results obtained by Breskaya et al. (2022) investigating two samples of Russian and Italian students. The three authors observed the same differences as we did in the 'social' and 'individual' dimensions of religious freedom—where Italians supported the former more, while Russians the latter. In the light of the common communist past of Russia and Croatia, these results deserve deeper attention.

[34] Religious affiliation, political orientation, religiosity, and political engagement.

the societal value of religious freedom which obtained the same result as in Italy, political orientation showed no effects in the other two cases.

The Italian outcomes align with the literature on political orientations and human rights. Previous studies showed that people identifying with left political parties were more likely to support endorsement of and commitment to human rights and less likely to support restriction (e.g., Cohrs et al., 2007; Hertel et al., 2009). More surprising is the Croatian result. A possible explanation could rely on the low political interest registered among young people in Croatia, where, according to the research of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 62% declare little or no interest in political affairs, while 12% stated that they were interested or very interested (Gvozdanović et al., 2019). These findings could also explain the ambiguity of the data on political orientation that we gathered in that sample, with most respondents ticking the number 5 to describe their orientation. As mentioned in the methodological chapter, the absence of a midpoint in the 10-point scale we used to measure political orientation leads respondents with a low political sophistication to use point 5 to express their latent orientation (see Hair et al., 1995, par.4.4.1). Stiftung's results might further confirm this assumption and explain that the absence of a correlation between political orientation and religious freedom in Croatia might depend on a more general lack of political culture among youth in that country.

In this work, religiosity also emerged as a strong predictor of endorsement of religious freedom's dimensions. In Italy, higher levels of religiosity corresponded with higher support for all aspects of religious freedom. In contrast, in Croatia, although religiosity was found significant in all three cases, it negatively impacted religious freedom as a 'societal value'. According to these results and previous studies, we suggest that both societal and individual religiosity could be a key variable in understanding the dissimilarities between Italy and Croatia. As reported in the results section (par. 5.2.2), we observed a significant difference between the two samples' religiosity levels. The same divergence could also be derived from the national differences that research on the topic has highlighted national research on the topic (e.g., Garelli, 2020, for Italy; Nikodem & Zrinščak, 2016, for Croatia). On the one hand, high levels of religiosity and religious homogeneity have been found to be strong predictors of social and religious discrimination in Christian-majority countries (Fox et al., 2021), thus partly explaining Croats' lower agreement with the societal value of religious freedom and the negative impact of religiosity on this dimension. On the other hand, religiosity could also shed light on the higher agreement of Croats with the individual value of religious freedom. We remind readers that this dimension was composed of three items appealing to

personal religious experience and spiritual fulfilment, while religiosity addressed religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, the higher individual religiosity of Croats might suggest that a higher value is placed on religious experience among them than among Italians, where what Garelli (2020) calls 'Catholics by tradition and culture' prevail, and the number of non-religious people grows.

Surprisingly, religious affiliations do not emerge as a predictor of any dimensions in both samples. In Italy alone, non-religious came out more in favour of the societal value of religious freedom than Catholics.

Finally, it is important not only to emphasise the differences but also to report the similarities between the two samples. Indeed, the results of the descriptive statistics on the three dimensions of religious freedom (par. 5.3) reveal a generalised and broad support of religious freedom among Italians and Croats, with most respondents scoring up to 4 in their agreement. This means that net of all the slight differences, in this albeit limited study, freedom of religion emerged as a recognised and consolidated value in both of the two countries.

6.2 Attitudes towards political secularism and establishment in Italy and Croatia

The second objective was to assess similarities and differences between Italians and Croatians in their attitudes towards the two forms of political secularism and establishment.

Looking at the descriptive statistics (par. 5.4), among both Italians and Croats, *institutional secularism* was the model that obtained the most support. Second, came *ideological secularism,* and last was *establishment*[35].

In terms of comparative results, the political and religious histories of Italy and Croatia led us to hypothesise that *institutional secularism* and *ideological secularism* would be more supported in Italy than in Croatia, while *establishment* was more favoured in Croatia than in Italy. The results supported these hypotheses, except for *ideological secularism,* whose difference between the two countries was not statistically significant.

These findings are interesting for several reasons. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (par. 2.3), Modood (2010) argued that 'a historically evolved and evolving compromise with religion are the defining features of Western European secularism, rather than the absolute separation of religion and politics'. The results suggest that this convergence also exists at the level of social attitudes towards State and religion relations, even though the literature often stresses the

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[35] It is important to mention that both models, in both samples, had mean scores lower than 3.5, showing that, on average, both Italian and Croatian respondents disagreed with them.

differences more than the similarities between Western European and Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies about religion (see Borowik 2007). Research by Ančić and Zrinščak (2012) had already shown that, beyond the processes of religious revitalisation and politicisation of religion that affected the former Yugoslavia, in Croatia, as in other post-communist countries, people's expectations of religion-politics-society relations reflected a pattern very similar to that of Western Europe (see also Zrinščak, 2011). These findings might contribute to confirming this hypothesis: at least among the younger generations, in Italy and Croatia, the idea of separation between religion and State seems to prevail, although a selective collaboration between the State and religions is mostly supported by both Italians and Croats. However, we should not over-generalize these results. It must be noted that Italy and Croatia are Catholic countries, marked by a strong majority religion and fewer secularisation degrees than other European countries (Perez-Agote, 2012). Therefore, further comparative data would be needed to evaluate these perceptions in other countries characterised by different socio-religious features, such as Orthodox Christian countries, or countries with a prevalence of non-believers and State-endorsed ideological forms of secularism, such as France.

Secondly, the findings on *establishment*, with Croats the model more than the Italians, seem more in line with the literature on the revitalisation of religion and politicisation of religion in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. In this light, it could also confirm the hypothesis that, at the societal level, religion-nationalism links and strong ties between religion and national culture increase support for establishing the majoritarian religion(s), since this latter is considered essential for preserving one's national identity (Fox & Breslawski, 2023). However, it must be underlined that, on average, less than a fifth of the respondents stated they were in favour or very much in favour of the model, while the vast majority affirmed that they strongly or very strongly disliked it (par. 5.4.3).

Finally, the results raise questions about the correspondence between the religious image of a country, its Church-state relations model, and the emergence of different attitudes towards religion and State in society (see Zrinščak, 2011). Indeed, in this case, too, religiosity combined with religious homogeneity might play a crucial role in the perception of the role religion should play in the state and society. The higher support of *institutional secularism* as opposed to *ideological secularism*—and thus the recognition of a greater legitimacy for religion to intervene in the public sphere—leads us to suppose that both of the two countries' historically highly religious nature, plus the role of Catholicism in shaping national identity and historically providing for social needs, might be critical factors for the imparting of

significance to the social role of churches, even despite the acknowledgement of the democratic and modern principle that state and religion should operate in separate spheres.

6.3 Religious affiliation and political orientations: do they matter?

Religious affiliation

Concerning the relationship between religious affiliation and secularism (par. 5.5), the descriptive statistics showed that *institutional secularism* was the orientation most supported by all three religious groups in Italy and Croatia. Regarding the differences between the different groups, the ANOVA's survey results show that in the Italian sample being non-religious, Catholic or a member of a religious minority had no significant influence on the endorsement of *institutional* and *ideological secularism*, while in Croatia, it did. Indeed, in the Croatian sample, support for *institutional secularism* was lower among Catholics than among non-religious.

The Italian result is in line with the most empirical literature on secularism, where the irrelevance of religious affiliations for endorsing secularism is commonly asserted (e.g., Campbell et al., 2018; Fox, 2018). In contrast, the Croatian result would require more speculation. It can be read in line with the literature on the link between religious nationalism and secularism (Hibbard, 2015) or it can be understood in the light of the threat theory, which will be developed further in relation to the relationship between Catholics and religious establishment in Italy and Croatia.

Indeed, unlike secularism, the *establishment* model turned out to be very sensitive to religious affiliation. In Croatia, Catholics were the group that supported this orientation more than any other. In Italy, however, there was an apparent contradiction. Not only Catholics but also religious minorities support *establishment* significantly more than no religion. This unexpected result could be interpreted according to the hypothesis of Martino (2014) who, analysing State-Church relations in the Italian context, states that religious minorities in the country seem to be more accepting of a hierarchisation of religious denominations than the non-religious and that they may prove to be 'more frightened by demands from the secular world than by the supremacy exercised by the church' (p. 53). It could also be a further confirmation of the hypothesis of Fox et al. (2021) of an alliance, in Christian-majority countries, between Christian majorities and some religious minorities against secularism. However, this aspect would require further investigation. Indeed, Finke et al. make a distinction regarding the characteristics of the minorities that are part of this 'alliance', arguing that those who support

it are the ones that pose 'less of a competitive threat' (Fox et al., 2021, p. 14) to majority religions, such as Muslims or Jews. In our sample, by contrast, in addition to being small in number, minorities are also grouped together, leaving little room for elaboration of the differences between them.

The result on the correlation between Catholic affiliation and *establishment* also requires attention, as the same finding occurs in both the Italian and the Croatian sample. On the one hand, the result can be explained following Gill's (2008) rational choice approach, which, in the words of Fox et al. (2021) states: 'Majority religious institutions tend to seek religious hegemony. That is, they seek to use their own societal influences as well as their government to maintain a religious monopoly. While their motivations likely include ideology, they also include institutional motivations. Religious monopolies provide more congregants, more funds, and more influence'. On the other hand, another perspective which could be helpful for interpreting Italy and Croatia's case is that of Castle (2015) in his study on the electoral impact of United States public opinion on support for religious establishment. There, he argues that individuals who feel their values threatened may be more likely to care about religious establishment (Castle, 2015, p. 819). In Italy and Croatia, the content of these threats may differ. In general, according to Stephan and Stephan (2000), they may be 'realistic threats' or 'symbolic threats'. The former are threats to the 'very existence of the group (e.g. through warfare), to the political and the economic power of the in-group, and to the physical or material well-being of the in-group or its members (e.g. health)'; the latter 'primary involve perceived group differences in moral, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes' (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.25). In the case of Italy, 'symbolic threats' for Catholics might be represented by pluralization of the religious sphere (Pace, 2013), affected by the growth of religious minorities and non-believers, and in general, the perceived rising secularism, reflected in the debate about religious symbols and morality policy issues (Martino, 2014). In the context of the United States, research shows that the more secular people there were in one district, the more the same district's white evangelical Christians went on to vote for Republican presidential candidates (Campbell, 2006, in Castle, 2015). In Croatia, on the one hand, the communist past and the recent memory of the war, with its legacy of a religious landscape marked by conflicting relations between religious groups, may have left the legacy of a 'realistic threat' to the power of the Catholic majority. On the other hand, the general processes of modernization and secularisation that began with the entry into the European Union could make Catholics feel threatened by the risk of losing their newly regained position and identity. Indeed, studies show

that more conservative Catholic Croats strongly oppose the EU, interpreting it as 'the carrier of decadence to areas less tainted by secularism' (Nelsen et al., 2011, p. 23).

It must be stressed that, as we have said, the same threat theory valid for the *establishment,* might be applied also to understand the discrepancy in the difference between non-religious and Catholics that we observed in results on *institutional secularism* in Croatia.

Political orientations

Concerning political orientations, as mentioned in the literature review, most of the empirical studies on secularism emerged to analyse its relationship with politics (e.g. Beard et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2018; Layman et al., 2021). Therefore, as one might expect, in our samples, all three models (institutional, ideological and establishment) were highly sensitive to the variable of political orientation, in both Italy and Croatia. Consistent with previous research on the subject, a right-left divide also emerged in this research marking respondents' positions on secularism and establishment. In both Italy and Croatia, the left-wing and the centre-oriented respondent supported significantly more than the right-wing ones the model of *institutional secularism*, while right-wing respondents supported more the model of the *establishment* than left-wing respondents. In contrast, *ideological secularism* gave divergent outcomes: while in Italy, the centre-oriented respondents resulted to support the model significantly more than left-wing ones, in Croatia there was not found any statistical difference among the groups.

While the latter result is more difficult to explain, perhaps due to those problems with the midpoints of the 10-point scale discussed in par. 4.4.1, the findings on *institutional secularism* and *establishment* models are not surprising as, traditionally, the Left has been associated with secular and egalitarian principles, while the Right with the defence of religious traditions as a bulwark of national identity. However, the lack of empirical studies on the subject in Europe does not allow us to speculate more on their wider implications. Most of the previous studies on the relationship between secularism and political behaviour have taken place in the United States, a society which is increasingly polarised on political and religious lines and characterised by the spreading of culture wars on many issues, including religion-state relations and religious liberty (Castle, 2019). The lack of previous empirical studies on the subject in Europe, the inapplicability of the concept of 'culture wars'' here (Giorgi & Ozzano, 2016) and, last but not least, the ambiguity of the definition of the political orientation variable do not allow us to over-emphasise these findings but just to highlight some thematic nodes, with the wish for more in-depth research in the future. The first concerns the need for a deeper comparison between Western and Eastern/South-Eastern Europe on the effects on social

attitudes on Church-state relations of the increasingly close confrontation between religious and secular on morality policies, including in Italy (Prearo, 2020) and Croatia (Tanfić, 2022; Anić, 2015). The second relates more to updating the causes of this 'polarisation' and assessing to what extent and why this politicisation of state-religion relations is a feature of the contemporary European religious landscape (see Pickel, 2017).

6.4 Secularism, religious establishment, and religious freedom

Institutional and ideological secularism

This study was primarily designed to assess whether, at the micro/daily level, endorsement of political secularism—which we conceptualise as *institutional* or *ideological secularism*—increases or limits support for religious freedom in Italy and Croatia. We hypothesised that, in both countries, *institutional secularism* would be supportive of all dimensions of religious freedom, while *ideological secularism* would not. The empirical evidence essentially confirmed our assumptions. Indeed, in both samples, *institutional secularism* positively influenced the social perception of religious freedom in all three dimensions. In Italy and Croatia, the more respondents supported *institutional secularism*, the more they positively perceived religious freedom as a social value, as an individual value, and as the freedom to express religion publicly. In contrast, *ideological secularism* was not found to influence perceptions of religious freedom, except for the freedom to express religion, which was negatively affected in both samples.

Although we are aware that, especially in reference to the ideological secularism the interpretation of this research's findings should be cautious, overall, the results seem to us significant as they have several methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications. First, they further confirm the idea that, methodologically and conceptually, the 'dichotomous separation of types of secularism' (Beard et al., 2013, p. 15) is the most appropriate for understanding the relationships between political secularism and religion, at least in Catholic European countries. The findings on the relationship between *institutional secularism* and religious freedom suggest that it is not sufficient to analyse political secularism only in its guise of 'competing ideologies' to religion (Finke, 2022; see also Cartabia, 2012; Fox, 2015; Glendon, 2018); we should also at least consider the opposite hypothesis that political secularism might consist in 'moral dispositions' that 'do not relate to religions solely through power contestations and conflicts but through shared moral sources as well' (Jakelić, 2022; see also Bhargava, 2011). At the same time, the negative effect of *ideological secularism* on the

dimension of religious freedom 'freedom to express religion' seems to provide further empirical evidence for Casanova's (2009) theory, confirming the hypothesis that the most crucial discriminant difference between the two models of secularism is their stance on the role religion should play in the public sphere[36].

Second, the survey results appeared consistent with Kuru's (2009) theory on the impact of the two models of secularism—in his terms, 'assertive' and 'passive'on the formation of policies on religion. He defined the two models as 'ideologies'[37]. He argued that the prevalence of one or the other in society underlies the differences in policies on religion that can be observed *between* and *within* countries, depending on historical periods. Kuru tested his hypothesis by looking at the effects of 'passive' and 'assertive' secularism on government policies, mainly studying elites in countries with 'exceptional' patterns of secularism—France, Turkey, and the United States. This research suggests that the same relationship between types of secularism and religious freedom can be generalised even at the micro-social level, at least in the two samples under investigation. On the other hand, the results highlight the possible predictive power of appropriate scales for measuring secularism. Since, still according to Kuru (2009), changes in the dominant ideology imply policy transformations, collecting adequate quantitative and comparative data on secularism and monitoring its variations at the micro-level might allow the prediction of political and social changes in religious governance *within* and *across* countries.

Concerning the existing empirical research on political secularism in society, the findings obtained add to those of other studies that have investigated the relations between political secularism and religious freedom within the framework of the SPRF theory. It is fair to stress that these studies were inspirational for our research, and the comparison with their results is of utmost importance. Our results on *institutional secularism* are consistent with what, for example, Olga Breskaya et al. (2021) found in Italy about what the authors, following Kuru, called 'passive secularism'. A model very similar to the one we refer to as *institutional secularism*; in their case, however, composed only of the item 'State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and allow them to be present in the public sphere'. The three authors observed the positive effect of that model of secularism on all five of the five dimensions of religious freedom that they tested (see par. 1.9). However, unlike the present research, their study did not find any significant impact of the 'assertive' model of secularism on any of the

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[36] See par. 2.4.
[37] *Idem.*

dimensions of religious freedom. This discrepancy in the results may be due to the different dimensions of religious freedom that they took into account and the choice to use a single item as an indicator of the variable— that is, . ˙State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and confine religious expression to private sphere'.

The influence of 'passive' and 'assertive' secularism on religious freedom and social perception has also been tested by Breskaya et al. (2022) in Italy and in Russia. There, consistent with our and previous research, 'passive secularism' was found to have a positive impact on all the five dimensions of religious freedom examined in the study, in both the Italian and Russian samples. By contrast, the results of assertive secularism appeared more ambiguous and difficult to read, especially in the Russian case. Of note, however, is assertive secularism's negative impact, in the Italian sample, on what the authors call the 'Human rights aspects of religious freedom 1 (social)'. The result on this dimension, very similar to what we have named 'freedom to express religion', further confirms *ideological secularism*'s negative predisposition toward religion's presence in the public sphere.

Finally, it is important to comment on the similarity of the results obtained in the two countries and interpret them in the light of a wider debate. Even though Italy and Croatia have had different experiences of secularism and are characterised by different models of pluralism, they show common patterns in both dimensions of secularism regarding their effects on religious freedom. This similarity could further confirm the thesis—already expressed in paragraph 6.2—of the emergence of a common European model of religion-State relations, shared by both Western European and post-communist societies, and could provide more information on the elements that make it up. Indeed, beyond 'a trend towards disestablishment' (Zrinščak, 2011), this model seems to entail 'a substantial respect for individual religious freedom, the guarantee of autonomy and, in particular, self-administration of religious denominations, and a selective collaboration of states with the churches' (Ferrari, 2003, pp. 171-8, in Zrinščak, 2011).

Establishment

Following Bhargava (2011), we also added to our model the variable of *establishment*. In this case, following the empirical sociological research addressing the topic (Finke, 2013; Finke & Martin, 2014; Sarkissian, 2015), we assumed that establishment negatively influenced the social perception of religious freedom in Italy and Croatia. The results partially disconfirmed our initial assumptions, revealing some interesting differences between Italy and Croatia. If, in fact, this variable was found to have a negative impact on the "societal value" of religious

freedom in Italy, while having no effect on the other two dimensions; in Croatia, we found that it had a negative impact on the dimension of the societal value of religious freedom but was positive for the other two dimensions. First of all, the findings on the societal value of religious freedom are consistent with all those previous studies that establishment increases regulations and persecution of minorities, and decreases religious freedom (Finke & Martin, 2014; Fox, 2020; Grim & Finke, 2011; Sarkissian, 2015). In contrast, it is more difficult to understand the positive impact of the model on the other two dimensions in Croatia. In the absence of other theories, we suggest interpreting with reference to their different political and religious history and the position that religion has historically held in the two countries. As the results regarding religious affiliations and establishment showed, Catholics were the group that most approved of the establishment model in Croatia and Italy. Of those examined, the only dimension of religious freedom that explicitly refers to the equality of minorities is the one on the societal value of religious freedom, which in both samples was found to be negatively affected by the variable. The other two dimensions, instead, could be interpreted in the twofold sense of majority and minority freedom. Our hypothesis is that the different histories of the two countries have influenced the meaning attached to them, producing different outcomes. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Catholic religion has always held a predominant position in Italy. In the last few decades, its social dominance has been jeopardised by the arrival of new immigrants and the growth of the non-religious (Pace, 2014). In Italy, religious freedom was never a matter concerning Catholicism, but it was always, and still is, a concern for religious minorities (Beaman, 2016). In contrast, religious freedom is a recent achievement for all in Croatia. Although formally guaranteed by the Yugoslav Constitution, there, as in other post-communist countries, for decades religion was widely violently suppressed or at least 'tamed' by the communist government (Ballinger & Godhsee, 2011). Therefore, for decades, the quest for religious freedom involved not only minority religious groups but also majoritarian ones (Richardson, 2006). According to this perspective, we believe that a possible explanation of the positive relationship between establishment and the individual value of religion, but especially the recognition of its freedom to express itself in public, depends on the recent victory of religious freedom in Croatia and the historical experience of being a minority also shared by the Catholic majority. Clearly, further research would be needed to confirm this hypothesis, possibly qualitative research; still, our idea is that the socialist legacy of Croatia can be traced more to the analysis of the establishment model than to that of secularism.

6.5 Limitations of the research

The empirical results reported in this thesis should be considered in light of some limitations. In presenting these limitations, a distinction must be made between those due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and those that would also have been part of the original research design.

6.5.1 Limitations due to the Covid-19 pandemic

<u>*Mixed-mode survey*</u>

In recent years, mixed-mode studies have become widespread, yet many concerns still persist about the effects that the application of different data collection methods have on the reliability of research outcomes (de Leeuw et al., 2007). It has been shown that there are no relevant mode effects if the survey is well conducted. The most important differences occur on sensitive topics (Dillmann et al., 2007), which do not concern this research. There are several reasons why a researcher may choose to adopt a mixed data collection strategy, for instance, to reduce non-response bias or coverage bias or to ensure that research can also be conducted in places or situations with specific restrictions (Hox et al., 2007). In our case, the choice was conditioned more by the sudden spread of the pandemic than by an a priori assessed strategic plan. This is why we could not adapt the questionnaire to the different modes, at the risk of not using each mode to its full potential (Dillman et al., 2007). In order to overcome possible weaknesses, we tried to reproduce the same strategy for each mode, which we modulated on the original paper-and-pencil strategy, keeping the researcher present at all times during the completion of the questionnaire, whether on the phone, in person or online.

<u>*Quantitative research methods*</u>

As we explained above, our research design and the choice of a quantitative methodology are justified based on an empirical tradition established in sociological research on religious freedom and human rights over the last two decades. Nonetheless, especially in the light of social constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2015), integrating qualitative methods would have ensured a more complete analysis of the research problem (<u>Migiro & Magangi, 2011</u>). However, the restrictions due to the pandemic, which impacted the possibility of meeting people in person and reduced time to complete the project, forced us from the outset to discard this hypothesis and focus only on quantitative methods.

6.5.2 Other limitations

<u>*Sample*</u>

Of the second group of limitations, the major one was the necessity of using a convenience sample. The goal of every quantitative research is the statistical generalizability of the results (external validity). For this reason, the ideal should be to use probability sampling techniques since they are more reliable and allow researchers to make inferences about the entire population. However, in social sciences, non-probability samples are widely used for reasons of time and costs, especially by Ph.D. students and early career researchers. We also decided to use a convenience sample as it is less costly and time-consuming, thus more in line with the time and budget of our Ph.D. program.

We know the many concerns expressed in the literature about the appropriateness of using inferential statistical techniques on non-probabilistic samples (e.g., Hirschauer et al., 2021). It is, in fact, the accepted view that inferential statistics are only applicable to probabilistic samples. However, despite recognising the desirability of a probabilistic sample, we agree with Hubbard et al. (2019) that it is not only difficult to obtain them in reality but also not always desirable for making predictions, especially in humanities and social sciences:

> [T]here is the largely unrecognised admission that the formal statistical inference model is misleading in the context of analytic/predictive studies. This is because appraisals of external validity must involve characteristics included in the study along with others which are not (Hubbard and Lindsay, 2013a; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, 2002). As Leviton (2001) noted, to be confident in making broad generalisations necessitates sampling from a "super-population" composed of every circumstance imaginable which may impact the result. It is obvious that no single study has this capability and so offers scant evidence of the external validity of an outcome (Leviton, 2001, p. 5197). And paradoxically, seeking representativeness can actually reduce the precision of results in regard to their application or generalizability to particular situations. That is, when making a prediction we must anticipate the different factors (subpopulations) that may affect a result and deal with them directly (in Hubbard et al., 2019, p.94).

Contrary, therefore, to those who claim that research using non-random samples is inferior or even invalid, Hubbard et al. (2019) argue that:

> Nonrandom samples, allied with a replication strategy, can yield robust findings. Which is to say that, over time, via replication research, the point estimates and confidence intervals of additional

(new) results about the phenomena at hand may be compared with the increasingly sturdy benchmarks established by their numerous predecessors to check for consistency. Consistency gained in this manner leads to deserved support for the veracity of the findings (p.96).

Ideological secularism

As we reported in Chapter 4, we recognise as a limitation of this research the lack of robustness of the scale of ideological secularism. This may be due to various factors, such as a poorly understood formulation of the questions or a different interpretation, due to cultural-historical factors, of the terms 'religion/religion' in them.

This weakness may explain some ambiguous results, such as the absence of a difference in terms of support for ideological secularism between Italy and Croatia, despite the fact that we had assumed that we would find greater support for the variable in Italy than in Croatia due to the latter's socialist heritage, or the lack of difference between right-wing and left-wing respondents in their support of ideological secularism, already verified in other research.

However, we believe that the results, especially when viewed from the perspective of the social sciences, are still useful from an exploratory perspective, especially for their consistency with theories on the relations between political secularism and religion.

Based on this, we suggest two strategies for future research. Firstly, a replication of the study, in order to test the functioning of this scale in other contexts and the reliability of the results obtained in this research. Secondly, where possible, we suggest further developing the scale, on the one hand, by keeping the place of religion in society as the discriminator between institutional and ideological secularism, as it has proven effective in detecting the different effects of these two models on religious freedom, even at the micro-social level; on the other hand, by accompanying it with a greater sensitivity and specification more in line with the historical, political and social contexts in which the scale is tested.

6.6 Suggestions for further research

First of all, in further research, we suggest addressing and attempting to resolve the above-mentioned limitations. However, we believe that the results of this research also highlight other theoretical and methodological nodes and that research on this topic could benefit from deepening them both in a comparative sense and on the basis of single case studies.

Political secularism

First of all, we hope for a 'Europeanisation' of the study of political secularism. As we have seen, its study has mostly used the U.S. as a point of reference. However, the different characteristics of European societies (par. 2.5), from the point of view of both religious and political history, suggest the importance of investigating political secularism's content and effects on social processes in a European context.

For instance, one of the results of this research is the high sensitivity of political secularism to political orientation. We believe that additional research is needed to explore this relationship further in Europe, understanding whether we are experiencing a polarisation on these issues similar to the United States, and what the links are between the politicisation of Church-State relations and the secularisation trends on this continent (Pickel, 2017).

Additional studies are also required to more deeply compare attitudes towards political secularism in Western and post-communist countries. One of the results of this research project is the convergence between Italian and Croatian respondents in their endorsement of a moderate model of secularism. This seems in contrast with most of the literature on the topic, which so far had stressed the differences between Western and post-communist countries, highlighting the interplay between nationalism and religion and the strong ties between traditional Churches and State which characterise these latter. From here, by contrast, it seems that, to develop a full picture of political secularism in the European Union, additional studies will be needed addressing similarities and studying, from an empirical perspective, 1) the effects of Europeanisation on the relationship between young people and religion in South-Eastern countries, and 2) the impact of the developing of human rights discourse on views about religion-State relations.

The literature may also benefit from a deeper understanding of *ideological secularism*. We suggest that some correspondence exists between the patterns of secularist attitudes and religion-State institutional relations. Further research questions might develop this hypothesis and explore the dominant views in countries characterised by radical forms of secularism.

Finally, we believe that future research should unpack the religious groups used in this research. For a long time, secularism, especially political secularism, has been equated with the absence of religion. Therefore, empirical research into its relationship to diverse religious identities and affiliations is paramount. However, to understand this relationship well, a greater distinction between different identities willbe needed both in the group of the non-religious (bringing together religious 'nones', atheists, and agnostics) and in the group of religious

minorities. This more precise classification could benefit the study of secularism and religious freedom.

Religious freedom

In contrast to that of political secularism, the empirical study of religious freedom has developed rapidly, enabling the acquisition of much cross-national data over the last twenty years. Yet, empirical studies dealing with the lived experience of this right are still lacking. This is despite the increasingly consolidated empirical research on attitudes toward human rights in different worldwide contexts. Therefore, our first suggestion is to deepen the sociological understanding of religious freedom by developing measurement scales and designing comparative surveys that may effectively grasp the different dimensions of this social phenomenon.

Theoretical studies have dealt with the politicisation of religious freedom (Sullivan et al., 2015). n the United States, due to the rise of far-right movements and parties, the relationship between politics and religious freedom is gaining scholarly interest (Castle, 2019). The relationship between religious freedom and political orientations, especially in Italy, shown by this research project's findings suggests that in Europe, too, this topic deserves more attention. Finally, we believe that one of this projects most important results has been to have demonstrated the empirical relevance of political secularism to understanding the lived experience of religious freedom. The intensification in Europe of the political debate on religion and the hardening of the confrontation between secular and religious people on morality policies and religious symbols (headscarves, crucifixes, etc.) calls for placing this relationship at the centre of the study of societies. From this perspective, it would be also promising to further explore the unexpected result that we have obtained on the positive impact of no religion on the societal value of religious freedom in Italy. As we mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, for some scholars (e.g., Glendon, 2018), the growth of secularism and the rise of non-religiosity could be harmful to protecting religious freedom in Western democracies. Our findings might suggest the opposite, and call for bringing non-religious back to the centre of the studies on religious freedom (Beaman et al., 2018).

Concluding thoughts

Today, religious freedom's interaction with a broad spectrum of rights, and its relationship with 'religion', one of the most debated concepts of the contemporary world, put it at the centre not only of the human rights agenda but also of public debates of national political communities in

Europe. Yet, despite this centrality in international and European public life, there is still a lack of knowledge about how this right translates into the lived experience of people around the world and the structural conditions that shape its meaning. We still know too little about what people think about religious freedom and what the roots are that shape these different perceptions, attitudes, and views. This thesis has attempted to investigate one of these roots. It provides an insight into the role of political secularism in shaping the social perception of religious freedom, showing that the relationship between political secularism and religious freedom is a complex and fascinating interaction of individual and structural variables. It demonstrated that political secularism matters for the definition of 'what religious freedom means' in society, and that studying political secularism is important not only in 'exceptional' secular states but, maybe above all, in states where political secularism and religious freedom are still a work in progress, contested and willed, intertwined with the history, hopes, traumas and injustices of the societies in which they are being constructed.

Further work is needed. However, we hope to have shed light on the methodological challenges that lie in the empirical study of political secularism and religious freedom, and on the importance of looking at the multifaceted nature of these phenomena in order to better understand their effects on social processes. Moreover, we hope that the results of this research will influence scholars of religious freedom and human rights practitioners to increasingly look at religious freedom as an embedded concept, whose richness goes beyond its normative aspects and lies in its deep rootedness in contemporary, international and national, social and political processes.

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Appendix – A

The English version of the questionnaire 'Religion and citizenship'

This questionnaire looks at what you think about religion, religious freedom, and citizenship. Please say what you really think and try to be as honest and accurate as possible. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to these questions. We want to know your views. Everything you tell us is completely private and confidential. Thanks for your help!

A – About you   Please tick (√) the appropriate box

---

1. What is your sex?

Male	1	
Female	2	

2. Do you have Italian citizenship?

No	1	
Yes	2	

3. What is your age?

Number		

4. What year of University are you in?

BA 1 year	1	
BA 2 year	2	
BA 3 year	3	
MA 1 year	4	
MA 2 year	5	

5. Where were you and your parents born?

	5_a you		5_b your mother		5_c your father	
Italy	1		1		1	
Europe	2		2		2	
Africa	3		3		3	
America	4		4		4	
Asia	5		5		5	
Australia	6		6		6	

6. What is the highest level of your and your parents' education?

	6_a your		6_b your mother		6_c your father	
Primary School	1		1		1	
Secondary School	2		2		2	
University	3		3		3	

7. Which of the following best describes the area you were born?

Urban	1	
Suburban	2	
Rural	3	

8. What is your religion? Please tick only one answer.

No religion	1	
Roman-Catholic	2	
Protestant	3	
Christian-Orthodox	4	
Pentecostal	5	
Other Christian tradition	6	
Muslim	7	
Jewish	8	
Buddhist	9	
Hindu	10	
Sikh	11	
Other (please specify)	12	

9. How often do you pray in your home or by yourself?

Never	1	
Occasionally	2	
A few times a year	3	
At least once a month	4	
At least once a weak	5	
Nearly every day	6	

10. Apart from special occasions (like weddings and funerals), how often do you attend a religious worship service (e.g. in a church, mosque or synagogue)?

Never	1	
Occasionally	2	
A few times a year	3	
At least once a month	4	
Nearly every week	5	
Several times a week	6	

11. Tick the **one** statement that comes closest to your own belief

Only one religion is really true and all others are totally false	1	
Only one religion is really true but at least one other is partly true	2	
All religions are equally true	3	
All religions express the same truth in different ways	4	
Real truth comes from listening to all religions	5	
All religions are totally false	6	
I do not know what to believe about religions	7	

12. Compared to other people of your age, how often would you say you take part in social activities (events/encounters with other people, by choice and for enjoyment rather than for reasons of work or duty)?

Much less than most	1	
Less than most	2	
About the same	3	
More than most	4	
Much more than most	5	

13. How often do you follow politics on media?

Never	1	
Occasionally	2	
At least once a month	3	
At least once a weak	4	
Nearly every day	5	

14. Did you vote in the last election?

No	1	
Yes	2	

15. Did you during the last 12 months participate in a meeting arranged by any political organization or trade union?

No	1	
Yes	2	

16. In political matters people talk of `the left' and `the right'. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking? **Circle a number**

left   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   *right*

17. I have attended classes on religion
(please tick all that apply)

At elementary school	No	1	Yes	2
At secondary school	No	1	Yes	2
At high school	No	1	Yes	2

18. I have learnt about religious freedom
in any of my classes
(please tick all that apply)

At elementary school	No	1	Yes	2
At secondary school	No	1	Yes	2
At high school	No	1	Yes	2

19. How would you describe the level of your family income?

Low	1	
Middle	2	
High	3	

20. How many languages do you speak?

Only Italian	1	
Italian and one more language	2	
Italian and two more languages	3	
More than three languages	4	

21. Tick the **one** statement that comes closest to your socialisation

I was socialised in Italian culture	1	
I was socialised partially in Italian and partially in another culture	2	
I was socialised in a non-Italian culture	3	

22. In terms of cultural identity people talk of `weak' and `strong' identification with their cultural heritage. How would you place your identification with Italian culture on this scale, generally speaking? **Circle a number**

Weak identification   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   *Strong identification*
with Italian culture   *with Italian culture*

23. If you have other origin than Italian, please specify your cultural identification with your native culture on this scale. **Circle a number**

Weak identification   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   *Strong identification*
with native culture   *with native culture*

24. Have you had any experience studying abroad?

At least three months	1	
At least six months	2	
At least one year	3	

24_a. If you had experience abroad,
please specify where was located
the country of your destination?

In Europe	1	
In North America	2	
In Central or South America	3	
In Asia or Oceania	4	
In Africa	5	

25. After your participation in the exchange program, could you please specify your satisfaction with the intercultural experience you got on the following scale. **Circle a number**

Low satisfaction with   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   *High satisfaction with*
intercultural   *intercultural*
experience   *experience*

B. About Religious Freedom The following questions are about your attitude toward different issues. Please read each statement and think: 'how true is this?'

If you *Agree Strongly* put a ring around.. (AS) A NC D DS
If you *Agree* put a ring around.. AS (A) NC D DS
If you are *Not Certain* put a ring around.. AS A (NC) D DS
If you *Disagree* put a ring around... AS A NC (D) DS
If you *Disagree Strongly* put a ring around.................................. AS A NC D (DS)

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26. For me, Religious Freedom means:

26_a	Freedom to choose my religious/non-religious identity	AS A NC D DS
26_b	Freedom to speak on religious matters openly and freely	AS A NC D DS
26_c	Protection from the state interference on religious issues	AS A NC D DS
26_d	Non-discrimination for religious minorities on the basis of religion	AS A NC D DS
26_e	Equality of various religions in society before the law	AS A NC D DS
26_f	An important right in a democratic society	AS A NC D DS
26_g	Non-violent co-existence for all religions in every society	AS A NC D DS

27. Please indicate how much you agree with the following aspects of Religious Freedom

27_a	It is important for everyone to be free to change their religion	AS A NC D DS
27_b	Children should be brought up in the religion chosen by their parents	AS A NC D DS
27_c	Everyone should be free to teach their religion, either in public or in private	AS A NC D DS
27_d	Everyone should be free to observe dietary practices prescribed by their religion	AS A NC D DS
27_e	Everyone should be free to invent a new religion	AS A NC D DS
27_f	Every religious leader/group should be free to renew their religion	AS A NC D DS
27_g	Every religious group should be free to establish houses of worship in the localities of their choosing	AS A NC D DS
27_h	Every religious group should be free, in some case, to place their religious beliefs above national law	AS A NC D DS

28. How much do you agree that the following aspects of Religious Freedom are important for you?

28_a	Freedom to have no religion	AS A NC D DS
28_b	Freedom to have inner personal religious convictions	AS A NC D DS
28_c	Freedom to worship	AS A NC D DS
28_d	Freedom to wear religious clothes/symbols in public places	AS A NC D DS
28_e	Freedom to establish religious group	AS A NC D DS
28_f	Freedom to express religious views in the media	AS A NC D DS
28_g	Freedom to write, issue and disseminate religious publications	AS A NC D DS
28_h	Freedom to criticize religious leaders	AS A NC D DS
28_i	Freedom to criticize religious concepts/principles/dogmas	AS A NC D DS

29. How much do you agree that Religious freedom is important because:

29_a	It is connected with the idea of human dignity	AS A NC D DS
29_b	It is connected with search for individual truth	AS A NC D DS
29_c	It allows everyone to pursue their personal spiritual fulfillment	AS A NC D DS
29_d	It promotes non-discrimination on the basis of religion	AS A NC D DS
29_e	It promotes religious and cultural diversity in society	AS A NC D DS
29_f	It promotes inter-religious dialogue between religions	AS A NC D DS
29_g	It promotes equality as a principle of democratic citizenship	AS A NC D DS
29_h	It is important for tolerant and peaceful co-existence of religions	AS A NC D DS
29_i	It is an important legal principle for secular state	AS A NC D DS
29_j	Religious freedom is not important for me	AS A NC D DS
29_k	Religious freedom is more important than other freedoms	AS A NC D DS

30. How much do you agree with the following cases related to Religious Freedom protection in Italy?

30_a	People should be prohibited to wear religious clothes and religious symbols at the workplace	AS A NC D DS
30_b	No religious symbols of any religion should be allowed in public schools	AS A NC D DS
30_c	Students should be offered time, space and a room in schools to do their prayers	AS A NC D DS
30_d	The state should not prevent female teachers from wearing a head scarf for religious reasons	AS A NC D DS
30_e	History of religions classes should be taught by lay people in all primary and secondary public schools	AS A NC D DS
30_f	The state should allow the presence of symbols of religious minorities in public schools, since Catholic symbols are present there	AS A NC D DS

31. How much do you agree that the following social changes/challenges create a need for Religious Freedom in Italy?

31_a	Increasing numbers of non-religious people in Italian society	AS A NC D DS
31_b	The growth of alternative spirituality practices	AS A NC D DS
31_c	Hate crimes motivated by religious hatred	AS A NC D DS
31_d	Issues in public policy such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia	AS A NC D DS
31_e	The growth of Orthodox Christian population	AS A NC D DS
31_f	The growth of Muslim population	AS A NC D DS
31_g	The growth of refugees in Italy	AS A NC D DS

32. How much do you agree that the state should not interfere with the following affairs of religious groups?

32_a	The core beliefs and religious teaching	AS A NC D DS
32_b	The core ministry including matters of liturgy, confession, education of clergy	AS A NC D DS
32_c	The core administration including the right to appoint and dismiss employees, church discipline, and financial issues	AS A NC D DS

33. How much do you agree that?

33_a	Religious freedom should be aimed to protect more religious institutions than individuals	AS A NC D DS
33_b	Religious freedom should be aimed to protect individuals even against their religions	AS A NC D DS
33_c	Religious freedom should only apply to religions recognised by the state	AS A NC D DS
33_d	Religious freedom of religious minorities should be restricted during public emergencies	AS A NC D DS

33_e	Secular states should put principles of secularism over the right to freedom of religion	AS A NC D DS

34. How much do you agree with the following statements related to current situation with Religious Freedom in Italy?

34_a	Italian state provides equal conditions for the Catholic Church and religious minorities	AS A NC D DS
34_b	Italian state provides equal conditions for Catholics and non-religious people	AS A NC D DS
34_c	Italian state does not favor any religious group	AS A NC D DS
34_d	Italian state manages religious issues very well	AS A NC D DS
34_e	Discrimination on the grounds of religion does not happen in Italy	AS A NC D DS
34_f	The Catholic Church as part of Italian identity should be favored in society	AS A NC D DS

35. How much do you agree with the following claims about how the state should regulate religions in Italy?

35_a	The state should not interfere with missionary activities in majority religion	AS A NC D DS
35_b	The state should not interfere with missionary activities in minority religion	AS A NC D DS
35_c	The state should not interfere with public activities in majority religion	AS A NC D DS
35_d	The state should not interfere with public activities in minority religion	AS A NC D DS
35_e	The state should provide equal conditions for religious and non-religious people	AS A NC D DS
35_f	The state should not favor any religious group	AS A NC D DS
35_g	The state should educate the public to accept religious freedom	AS A NC D DS

36. How much do you agree with the following statements regarding various rights?

36_a	Women should have the right to be equally paid for equal work	AS A NC D DS
36_b	The state should protect women's right to adequate job opportunities	AS A NC D DS
36_c	Women should have the same rights during the dissolution of marriage	AS A NC D DS
36_d	Women should have the same right to become religious leaders as men	AS A NC D DS
36_e	The government should provide a decent standard of living for refugees	AS A NC D DS
36_f	The government should guarantee refugees access to education	AS A NC D DS
36_g	Refugees should have access to medical care	AS A NC D DS
36_h	The state should prosecute behavior that discriminates against homosexuals	AS A NC D DS
36_i	Homosexuals should have the right to hold any public office	AS A NC D DS
36_j	Homosexuals should have the right to marry	AS A NC D DS
36_k	The government should provide health care for the sick	AS A NC D DS
36_l	The government should provide a decent standard of living for the old	AS A NC D DS
36_m	State should guarantee a decent living for all citizens and their families	AS A NC D DS
36_n	People should be free to express any opinion whatsoever	AS A NC D DS
36_o	People should be free to discuss all moral ideas, no matter what	AS A NC D DS
36_p	People should be free to post on Twitter/Facebook whatever they like	AS A NC D DS
36_q	People should be prevented from expressing provocative religious ideas	AS A NC D DS

C – About Religion

37. Do you agree with the following definitions about you?   **NA - NOT APPLICABLE**

37_a	I am a religious person	AS A NC D DS NA
37_b	I am a spiritual person	AS A NC D DS NA
37_c	I believe in God	AS A NC D DS NA
37_d	My spiritual beliefs give my life a sense of significance and purpose	AS A NC D DS NA
37_e	My religious beliefs give my life a sense of significance and purpose	AS A NC D DS NA
37_f	My spiritual beliefs have a great influence on my daily life	AS A NC D DS NA
37_g	My religious beliefs have a great influence on my daily life	AS A NC D DS NA

38. It was important for me that in my childhood: **NA – NOT APPLICABLE**

38_a	My parents (relatives) talked with me on religious issues *(If your parents or relatives did not talk with you on religious issues, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA
38_b	I grew up in a religious family *(If you did not grow up in a religious family, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA
38_c	We had religious symbols at home *(If you had no religious symbols at home, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA
38_d	We prayed together with my family *(If you did not pray together with your family, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA
38_e	We read religious texts together with my family *(If you did not read religious texts together with your family, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA
38_f	We celebrated religious holidays together in the family *(If you did not celebrate religious holidays together with your family, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA
38_g	It was important not to have religious socialization in my family *(If you had religious socialization in your family, the answer will be NA)*	AS A NC D DS NA

D – About Society

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39. How much do you agree with the following statements about your life in Italy?

39_a	I take part in a lot of social activities	AS A NC D DS
39_b	I often meet with (or talk to) relatives or friends	AS A NC D DS
39_c	I feel that I am included within political life in Italy	AS A NC D DS
39_d	I am interested in politics	AS A NC D DS
39_e	Belonging to groups in Italian civil society is important to me	AS A NC D DS
39_f	I have close friends with whom I can discuss important matters	AS A NC D DS

40. How much do you agree with the following roles of religions in society? According to me, religions should:

40_a	Publicly stand up for the underclass	AS A NC D DS
40_b	Alleviate social needs of marginalised people	AS A NC D DS
40_c	Teach people to help the disadvantaged	AS A NC D DS
40_d	Reconcile people with each other in society	AS A NC D DS
40_e	Facilitate interfaith cooperation to end religious-based violence	AS A NC D DS
40_f	Facilitate humanitarian dialogue with non-religious people	AS A NC D DS
40_g	Provide spiritual guidance for their members	AS A NC D DS
40_h	Create places for deep spiritual experiences	AS A NC D DS

40_i	Take care of the spiritual well-being of their members	AS A NC D DS
40_j	Influence public opinion on social problems	AS A NC D DS
40_k	Intervene in societal affairs	AS A NC D DS
40_l	Have their own perspective on social problems	AS A NC D DS
40_m	Nurture people into the faith	AS A NC D DS
40_n	Strengthen religious experiences through collective practices	AS A NC D DS
40_o	Help people in their search for the sacred	AS A NC D DS
40_p	Offer solutions to moral problems of individuals	AS A NC D DS
40_q	Support morality in human relations	AS A NC D DS
40_r	Provide guidelines about right and wrong in human actions	AS A NC D DS
40_s	Go along with changing ideas in society	AS A NC D DS
40_t	Always keep up with current social trends	AS A NC D DS
40_u	Support social development	AS A NC D DS
40_v	Strengthen the national spirit	AS A NC D DS
40_w	Take a responsibility with the state for national culture	AS A NC D DS
40_x	Offer answers to questions about the meaning of life	AS A NC D DS
40_y	Give sense of purpose in life	AS A NC D DS
40_z	Give meaning to the social order	AS A NC D DS
40_a1	Shape social identity for people	AS A NC D DS
40_b1	Give people social connections in modern individualised society	AS A NC D DS
40_c1	Promote the freedom of religion	AS A NC D DS
40_d1	Promote tolerance towards other religions	AS A NC D DS

41. How much do you agree with the following statements about immigrants in Italy?

41_a	Immigrants take jobs away from Italians	AS A NC D DS
41_b	Immigrants make problems with crimes worse	AS A NC D DS
41_c	Immigrants are a strain on a country's welfare system	AS A NC D DS

42. How much do you agree with the following statements about relations between state, society, and religion in Italy?

42_a	State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and allow them to be present in public sphere	AS A NC D DS
42_b	State should be neutral and treat equally all religions and confine religious expression to private sphere	AS A NC D DS
42_c	State should guarantee special legal status of Catholicism and support close ties between Catholicism, politics, and culture	AS A NC D DS
42_d	State should guarantee special legal status of a preferred set of religions and recognize special role of them in cultural and political spheres	AS A NC D DS
42_e	State should be legally separated from all religions but support religious pluralism and participation of various religions in political and cultural spheres	AS A NC D DS
42_f	It is better if state controls religion and does not allow it to be present in public sphere	AS A NC D DS
42_g	We should tolerate differences in private sphere but assimilate "different culture or religion" to major/ dominant culture	AS A NC D DS
42_h	The right to have one's 'difference' (minority religiosity, ethnicity, etc.) should be recognised and supported in the public and the private spheres	AS A NC D DS

43. How much do you agree with the statements that all people in Italy regardless of their citizenship status should have:

43_a	A right to vote	AS A NC D DS
43_b	A right to protest	AS A NC D DS
43_c	A right to form a political party	AS A NC D DS
43_d	A right to health care	AS A NC D DS
43_e	A right to education	AS A NC D DS
43_f	A right to employment	AS A NC D DS

44. How much do you agree with the following statement that Italian citizen is a person who:

44_a	Holds Italian passport	AS A NC D DS
44_b	Lives in Italy	AS A NC D DS
44_c	Was born in Italy	AS A NC D DS
44_d	Has Italian descent	AS A NC D DS
44_e	Speaks Italian	AS A NC D DS
44_f	Keeps strong social relations with Italians	AS A NC D DS
44_g	Shares Italian cultural codes	AS A NC D DS
44_h	Makes active contribution to determining the future of Italian society	AS A NC D DS
44_i	Participates in voluntary civil society organizations	AS A NC D DS
44_j	Donate money for civic purposes	AS A NC D DS
44_k	Respects the Italian law	AS A NC D DS

45. People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Do you agree with the definition that you feel close to:

45_a	Your town/city	AS A NC D DS
45_b	Your region	AS A NC D DS
45_c	Your country	AS A NC D DS
45_d	Europe	AS A NC D DS
45_e	To the world	AS A NC D DS

46. How much do you agree with the following statements about religious diversity in Italy?

46_a	Having people from different religion in Italy is enriching	AS A NC D DS
46_b	Having many different religious points of view is good for Italian society	AS A NC D DS
46_c	Increasing numbers of religions groups in Italy cause unrest and tension	AS A NC D DS
46_d	In Italy it would be better to pay attention to one dominant religion and culture	AS A NC D DS

47. How much do you agree with the following statements?

47_a	I am satisfied with how Catholicism has developed in Italy during the last 10 years	AS A NC D DS
47_b	I am satisfied with how democracy has developed in Italy during the last 10 years	AS A NC D DS
47_c	I am satisfied with the political system in Italy	AS A NC D DS
47_d	It is important to me to live in a democratically governed country	AS A NC D DS
47_e	It is important to me to have together with the Italian citizenship the citizenship of European Union	AS A NC D DS

Appendix - B
Survey invitation email

Subject line: Prof. Giordan - Invito a partecipare!

Ti scrivo a nome del Prof. Giuseppe Giordan che sta coordinando una ricerca dal titolo 'Religione e Cittadinanza', promossa dalla Fondazione Intercultura e dall'Università degli Studi di Padova.

Ti chiediamo la disponibilità a partecipare con un'intervista **anonima** della durata di circa 35 minuti, **inviando il tuo numero di cellulare** a questa mail.
Un nostro ricercatore ti contatterà per accordarsi con te sul giorno e l'orario dell'intervista.

Grazie in anticipo per il tuo contributo

Daiana Menti

Assegnista di ricerca

Università di Padova